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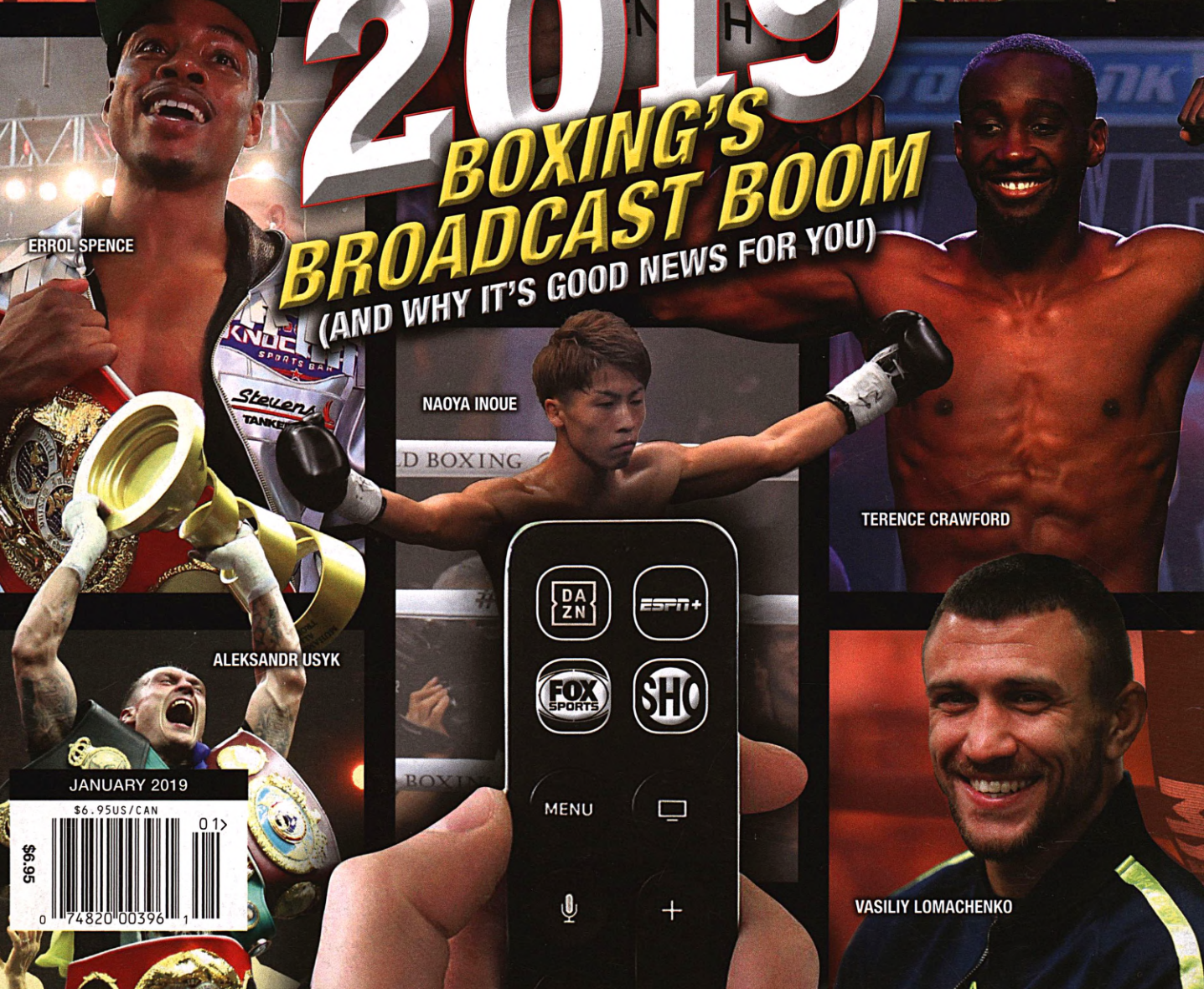

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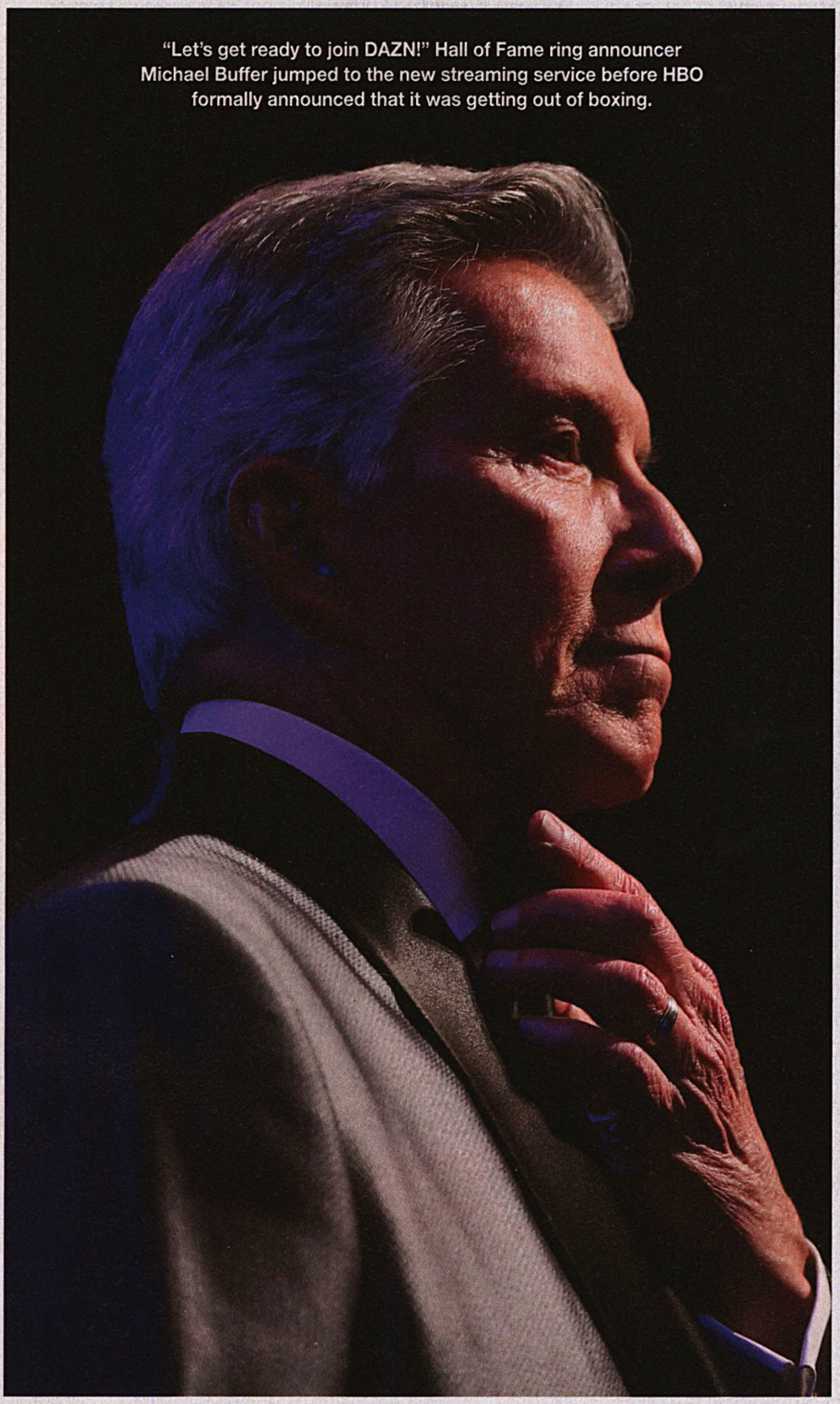

"Let's get ready to join DAZN!" Hall of Fame ring announcer Michael Buffer jumped to the new streaming service before HBO formally announced that it was getting out of boxing.

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HEAVYWEIGHT ANTHONY JOSHUA IS THE PRODUCT OF SIZE, TALENT, MONEY AND AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF SCRUTINY
By Gareth A Davies

OPENING SHOT

Featherweight prospect Shakur Stevenson may have come of age right before our eyes with his first-round blowout of Viorel Simion on the Terence Crawford-Jose Benavidez Jr. undercard. Stevenson (9-0, 5 KOs), a 2016 Olympic silver medalist who is only 21, dropped the battle-tested Romanian three times with perfectly timed power combos.

PHOTO BY ERIC FRANCIS/GETTY IMAGES

GIVE AJ A BREAK

It's great to see heavyweight boxing filling up the pages of the mainstream media again in a way that we haven't seen in decades, but I'm surprised at some of the sportswriters talking badly about Joshua in that he "won't travel to the U.S.," or that he should "fight Wilder and not hold out for more money." I think Joshua is the perfect example for other fighters – he knows he can fill out stadiums in the U.K. on his name alone, and he therefore will hold out for what he thinks he is worth. To me, that's the mark of a very smart man, and I don't doubt that when he retires he will do so healthy, happy and wealthy!

Owen Hollifield

CASTING ALERT

Is it true that Sylvester Stallone is making a major motion picture about the late, great Jack Johnson? I know that Johnson was the first black heavyweight champion of the United States back in 1908. I would like to know if they have started searching for actors to play the roles.

David L. Davis
Hanford, Calif.

EDITOR'S REPLY: Things change so quickly in Hollywood that the answer might be different by the time this sentence has been typed, but for now: Yes, it's true. As you probably know, Johnson was convicted in 1912 for violating the Mann Act, an absurdly racist charge not really worth rehashing here, and spent some time on the run before serving a prison sentence. A handful of U.S. politicians, including late senator John McCain, had made it their long-standing mission, spanning multiple administrations, to obtain a presidential pardon for Johnson, and in May 2018, Donald Trump finally obliged. At the signing ceremony was Stallone, who soon after launched his new production company, Balboa Productions, with the announcement of the Johnson biopic. It's probably a testament to Stallone's attachment to the story that he chose it as the first project for his company, as he has announced a whole slate of ambitious projects since then, but so far there aren't many details for the Johnson movie. It'll be a bonanza for actors looking to play interesting characters, though, with the fighters and promoters of the day up for grabs … and of course the role of Johnson himself. An informal poll around here couldn't come up with a leading contender. Any recommendations for Mr. Stallone?

TWEET OF THE MONTH

WRITE TO THE RING!
Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209
comeoutwriting@gmail.com
★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

Sylvester Stallone was on hand for Jack Johnson's presidential pardon, along with Johnson's great-great-niece, Linda Bell Haywood; heavyweight titleholder Deontay Wilder; former heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis; and WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman. The actor/filmmaker has taken a creative interest in the iconic heavyweight's story.

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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A NEW LANDSCAPE

HBO's September 27 announcement that it was getting out of the business of live boxing programming at the close of 2018 hit Generation X and Millennial fans hard. They literally grew up watching the biggest names of the sport engage in the most iconic fights of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s on the premium cable network.

What does it mean for the sport, many fans asked at the time, when the network that described itself as the "Heart and Soul of Boxing" for decades says its "audience research informs us that boxing is no longer a determinant factor for subscribing to HBO"?

Boxing Twitter, which is gloomy under the best circumstances, stepped up its collective anxiety and mixed it with melancholia in the wake of the news. However, the angst isn't reserved for the social media generation.

The WBSS has raised DAZN's profile in boxing.

Fans old enough to remember boxing before HBO, when world-class prizefights were a staple of the major broadcast networks, find themselves bewildered by the Netflix revolution. In recent years, they noted – with trepidation – how more matchups and fight cards they wanted to see were offered on apps and streaming services instead of on a TV network.

"What the hell is going on?" many longtime fans have exclaimed in letters to The Ring and in the comment sections of prominent boxing websites. "I don't want to watch fights on my laptop!"

With the launch of ESPN+ and DAZN coinciding with the demise of HBO's boxing programming, it must seem like uncertain times to boxing fans of all ages.

However, while the times are certainly changing – and doing so rapidly – it's not necessarily bad. Yes, HBO has thrown in the towel, but its subscription cable rival Showtime remains committed with the backing of Al Haymon's vast stable of elite talent, as does basic cable sports giant ESPN, which showcases Top Rank's world-class fighters, including the pound-for-pound dynamic duo of Vasiliy Lomachenko and Terence Crawford. And then there's DAZN, the new streaming sports service that launched in the U.S. in September with the Anthony Joshua-Alexander Povetkin heavyweight title bout. The digital platform already had multi-fight contracts with top British Promoter Eddie Hearn and the World Boxing Super Series, but DAZN proved to be a serious player in the crowded universe of online sports/entertainment subscription services when on October 17 it announced an exclusive deal to broadcast Canelo Alvarez's next 11 fights, beginning with the Mexican star's December 15 date with British super middleweight contender Rocky Fielding.

The record-breaking contract is a five-year partnership with Golden Boy Promotions that's worth a reported $365 million and includes 10 high-caliber fight cards per year from the Los Angeles-based company.

So, maybe things aren't so bleak for the sport, post-HBO, after all.

For our cover story (page 18), we enlisted the help of industry insider Evan Rutkowski to explain how the competition between the boxing-dedicated networks and platforms will benefit the fans. The editors of The Ring then threw in a few more reasons why 2019 might be the start of a new – and better – era for boxing.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

CALLUM SMITH

The Ring ratings panel was touch-and-go about whether the World Boxing Super Series final between George Groves and Callum Smith would be contested for the vacant super middleweight championship. Groves, the WBA titleholder, was ranked No. 1 and was therefore beyond reproach. However, Smith was ranked No. 3, behind WBO beltholder Gilberto Ramirez, and that was reason for debate. Ultimately, the bout was approved by the smallest of margins, and Smith justified that decision by winning big. The Englishmen threw down in the unusual setting of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with each man exhibiting world-class skills at the King Abdullah Sports City. Smith made an impression early with a powerful right hand that seemed to have an effect on the older fighter every time it landed cleanly. Groves, utilizing his superior experience, managed to get a foothold behind an educated left jab and some nifty counterpunching, but he was unable to keep Smith at bay. Midway through the seventh, the champion connected with a right, but a left-hook counterpunch from Smith sent Groves stumbling into his own corner. The Liverpool man followed up brilliantly, blasting home an assortment of power shots punctuated by a brutal body shot that sucked the fight out of Groves, who was unable to beat the count. Smith (25-0, 18 KOs) turned in his finest performance when it mattered most. "I want unification fights, because there are a few world titles that I still don't own," the 28-year-old told The Ring after the fight. "And, if I stay around, I'm sure I'm big enough to move up (to light heavyweight) and try and become a two-weight world champion. But I've always been looking ahead, whereas with this fight, I said to myself, 'If I win this fight, I'm going to sit back and enjoy it and be proud of what I achieved.'"

In winning the WBSS final, Callum Smith became only the third boxer to earn the Ring super middleweight championship (after Joe Calzaghe and Andre Ward).

AMER HILABI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Texas native Michael Dutchover saw fit to pursue his pro career in Southern California, where nine of his 11 bouts have taken place.

NEW FACES

MICHAEL DUTCHOVER

By **STEVE KIM**

While many of Michael Dutchover's classmates from Midland High School went off to various colleges across Texas, he decided that his higher education in boxing would take place farther away.

As Dutchover was courted by various managers and promoters after a successful amateur career that included a bronze medal at the Olympic Trials and a silver at the 2016 National Golden Gloves, he developed a connection with Danny Zamora, who was interested in training and managing the junior lightweight prospect.

But there was a particular request that Zamora had: Dutchover would have to leave the safe and cozy confines of his hometown about 50 miles east of the New Mexico border and move out west to the Los Angeles area, where he would be challenged by a more vibrant gym scene and a deeper pool of talent on a daily basis.

"That's why he came out … to let him know, 'Hey, this is how it's going to be. This is how you're going to get better, and this is the only way it's going to work out,'" said Zamora, who runs his own gym in Santa Fe Springs, a suburb about 10 miles outside of L.A.

And for Dutchover (11-0, 8 KOs), who is co-promoted by Thompson Boxing and Banner Promotions, it's the best decision he ever made.

"I know that's part of the sacrifice I had to make," said Dutchover. He actually came to Zamora's gym while still in high school and was able to spar with former lightweight titleholder Darleys Perez, who promptly dropped the young Texan in one of their sessions.

"It's part of the investment I have to make for myself, and I know moving over here to Southern California, which is rich in sparring, I'm getting better every fight," said the 20-year-old. "I'm feeling stronger, more confident, and I'm just reaching for the stars."

Dutchover admits that the adjustment to not being the big fish in a small pond was difficult. "I'm the big dog in Midland, Texas, and I go to gyms (in Southern California) and I see world champions like nothing. But I got very used to it and started getting to training camps with Oscar Valdez, Jessie Magdaleno, guys of that magnitude. They liked my work and that says a lot for somebody my age and only a couple of fights, and so I keep learning with the game. I have the passion for boxing and I'm going to keep learning."

In July, he scored a vicious one-punch knockout of Sergio Ramirez, and then in his most recent fight he stopped Bergman Aguilar in five, halting him with a left hook to the body. Dutchover has clearly settled into the professional game. Zamora is pleased with his pupil's progress: "He's developed into a top prospect, I believe. He's come around a lot; I think his last couple fights have shown a lot."

While the KO of Martinez was eye-opening, how Dutchover adapted to the difficult and awkward Aguilar, who switched stances often in this contest, was particularly impressive to Zamora.

"I saw something different in him. He turned lefty himself; he's never done it before, so I liked what I saw. He's comfortable enough to do that," said Zamora, who still isn't quite sure if Dutchover will settle in at 130 and 135 as he begins the process of moving up the rankings. "I tell him, 'You're a big kid, you're developing physically.'"

Dutchover is satisfied by his own progress as a professional: "Thompson Boxing and the matchmakers there, they're getting me some good fights. They don't put me in there with no scrubs. They want to test me, and I show my skills every time, every fight. My coach, Danny Zamora, and I, we're on the same page, and I feel like things are clicking on all cylinders right now. We're on a knockout streak – three knockouts – and we're going to keep that going."

He's still a way from challenging for a world title, but 2019 will be key in his development.

"I'm going to be fighting for regional belts, defending regional belts, getting close to titles, being a contender," Dutchover said. "That's where I see myself in a year." RING

Steve Kim is a veteran boxing columnist and commentator based in Southern California. You can follow him on Twitter @steveucnlive.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

SHANNON BRIGGS GOES GREEN

Shannon Briggs still dreams of one more shot at heavyweight glory, but in the meantime, the former lineal champ is investing in the therapeutic use of marijuana.

It has long been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. So let's stop and gaze fondly at the gentleman with outstretched arms standing amidst dozens of marijuana plants that are flourishing beneath indoor LED lights.

Shannon Briggs is 46 years old. He turned pro at age 20 and has compiled a 60-6-1 (53 knockouts) ring record over the past quarter century. There have been high points: victories in his first 25 fights, which made him a highly touted prospect, and a questionable verdict over George Foreman that brought him the "lineal" world heavyweight championship. And lows: Briggs was knocked out by Darroll Wilson, an early setback that raised questions about his fortitude, and lost an eight-round majority decision to a 9-and-9 club fighter named Sedreck Fields when Shannon came in unprepared and out of shape.

There was also a 1998 defeat at the hands of Lennox Lewis, when Briggs gave Lewis all he could handle for five dramatic rounds. And a night in 2010 when Shannon displayed extraordinary courage as he endured a brutal beating from Vitali Klitschko but lasted a full 12 rounds.

Briggs is still hoping for another big payday in boxing. He's riding a nine-bout winning streak that includes seven first-round knockouts over opponents he was expected to knock out in the first round. But he last fought on May 21, 2016. And as a practical man, Shannon has been looking for other sources of income.

This brings us to Champ RX LLC – a Shannon Briggs venture that's producing an "alternative health and wellness" line of cannabidiol (CBD) products that are THC-free.

Cannabidiol is a marijuana plant extract that, while not making users "high," has been prescribed to treat cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and has additional therapeutic properties. Its adherents claim that CBD can ease pain and

shorten recovery time after heavy exercise and injury. It's sold in lotion, gel, cream and oral spray form, and can also be applied under the tongue with a dropper. Many variants of CBD are legal under the World Anti-Doping Agency code.

Briggs is particularly fond of CBD isolate, which he describes as "cannabidiol in its purest form possible." He then explains, "CBD isolate crystals are a fine white powder that only contains the cannabidiol chemical compound. CBD isolate powder and CBD isolate crystals are the most powerful punch of CBD you can get your hands on."

CBD is a booming business. It's also often a cash business because many banks refuse to handle accounts for businesses that deal in marijuana products. And it's expected to grow exponentially in the years ahead as more and more states relax their laws regarding the sale and use of marijuana.

Meanwhile, it would be interesting to know what Briggs does with the "waste product" (THC) from his horticultural venture.

★★★

The Association of Boxing Commissions took a natural next step at its 2018 convention in Orlando when it voted, with only two states dissenting, to make BoxRec.com the sole official record keeper for boxing in the United States.

The Ali Act, which went into effect in 2001, mandates that the ABC keep certain boxing-related records. Thereafter, the ABC granted Fight Fax the status of what was essentially a government-mandated monopoly. Every state athletic commission in America was required by law to send bout results, suspensions and federal ID numbers to Fight Fax (as were ABC associate members in Canada). In exchange for its favored position, Fight Fax provided an updated list of suspended boxers to these commissions free of charge. But everyone else had to pay for the list. And more significantly, the ABC required that promoters submit a Fight Fax record for each boxer on a proposed fight card before the card was approved by the governing athletic commission. Fight Fax charged promoters (and everyone else other than commissions) for these records.

Meanwhile, BoxRec.com was growing. The site was founded by John Sheppard in 2000 and has become far-and-away the world's most heavily trafficked website dedicated exclusively to boxing.

Sheppard reports that, on a typical day, BoxRec.com has well over 100,000 visitors who view three-quarters of a million pages. And these numbers increase significantly in the week before a big fight.

BoxRec's core content consists of more than 2,156,000 bouts that have been entered into its database. This includes roughly 23,000 active (having fought within the past 365 days) and 602,000 non-active fighters. The site also has data on more than 74,000 referees, judges, managers, promoters, matchmakers, supervisors and other "non-fighters." All of these numbers keep growing as new fights take place and more old ones are recorded.

Sheppard has steadfastly resisted the temptation to turn BoxRec.com into a pay site. The undertaking is fueled largely by his efforts and the work of 200 editors from around the world who contribute their services for free. For years, he tried to get fight reports and other data such as suspension lists from governing state athletic commissions. Some commissions provided the information to BoxRec as a matter of course. Some sent it upon request. A few refused to send it even when asked.

That changed in 2016 when the ABC designated both Fight Fax and BoxRec as official registries and entered into separate two-year contracts with each. Thereafter, all athletic commissions subject to Ali Act jurisdiction were required to send fight reports to both record keepers. At the same time, the ABC requested certain system upgrades from Fight Fax. Fight Fax did not implement these upgrades and did not send a representative to the 2018 ABC convention. Therefore, only BoxRec's contract with the ABC was renewed.

The two holdout states in the voting were Pennsylvania and Texas, both of which felt that Fight Fax should be afforded the opportunity to remain as an alternative record keeper in light of its past contributions. But it wasn't to be.

Congratulations to BoxRec.com. Now, more than ever, it's boxing's indispensable website.

★★★

Lewis Dial, a sportswriter for the Amsterdam News in the 1930s, once opined, "You can fight better with a broken hand than with a broken heart."

Here are more words of wisdom from boxing writers:

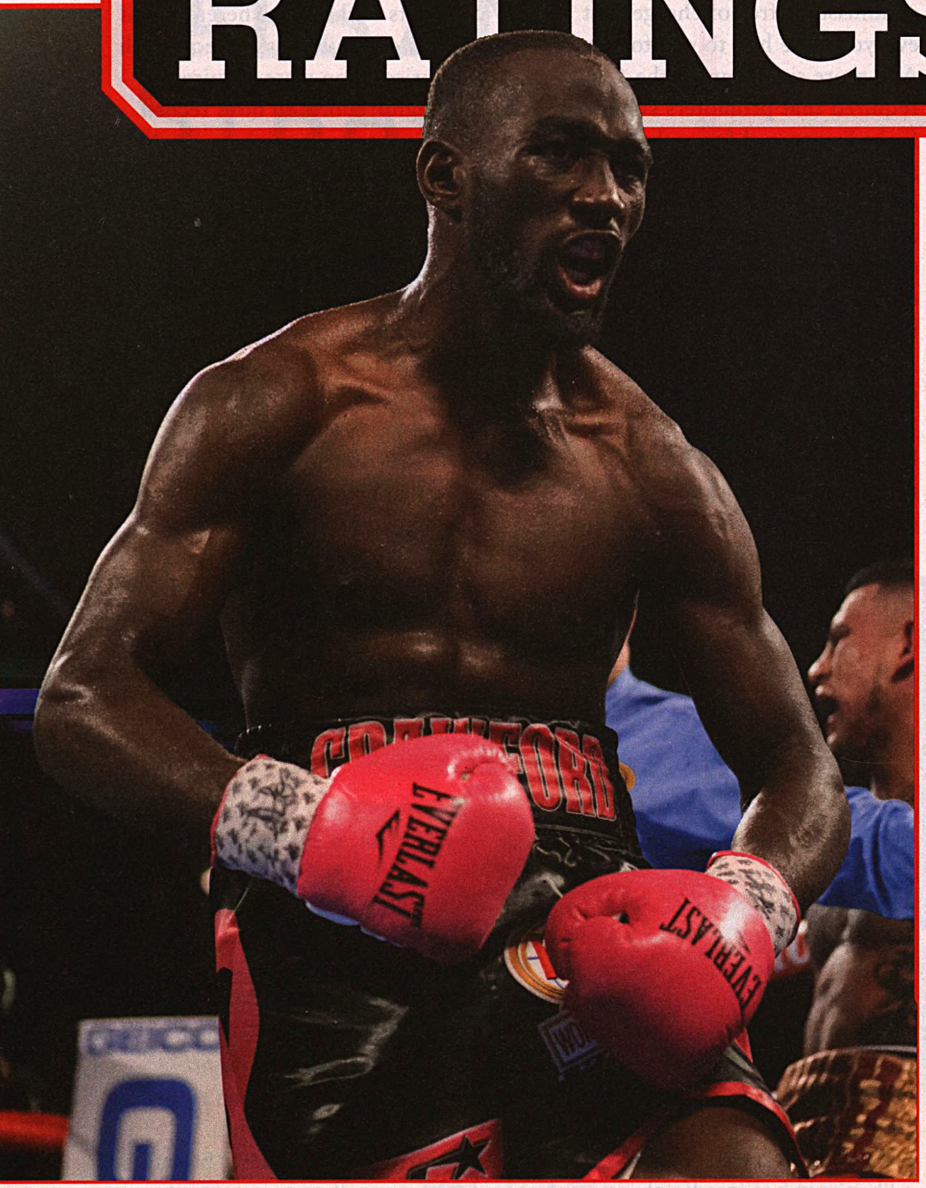
Randy Roberts: "Far more boxers' careers have been ruined by free time than by punches."

Brin-Jonathan Butler: "Boxers don't just walk out onto a tightrope with no net. Everyone's cheering to help jiggle the rope."

Charles Farrell: "No one can disabuse you of the notion of being a tough guy faster than a professional fighter." RING

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published thus autumn by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

RATINGS



Terence Crawford's final-round stoppage of Jose Benavidez Jr. advanced the WBO 147-pound titleholder one spot in the welterweight rankings.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)

3 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 50-1-2 (34 KOs)

4 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)

5 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)

6 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)

8 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)

9 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

10 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 41-1-5 (23 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: In his first bout of the World Boxing Super Series 118-pound tournament, Naoya Inoue went full "Kaiju" on Juan Carlos Payano and knocked him out in 70 seconds. It was more than enough to elevate Inoue from No. 7 to No. 6.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Once again, Anthony Joshua faced a top heavyweight, heard disaster at his doorstep and pulled off the TKO. This time his opponent was Alexander Povetkin, who dropped from No. 3 to No. 5 while Joshua stayed put at No. 1.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Ruslan Fayfer's "0" was the one to go, taken by the still-undefeated American Andrew Tabiti with a unanimous decision in Russia. Tabiti rose from No. 8 to No. 7 as a result.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Callum Smith (No. 3 last month) left the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wearing The Ring crown after winning the WBSS tournament with a seventh-round knockout of George Groves, who lost his WBA strap and sank from No. 1 to No. 4. Smith leaving behind contendership created room from Jesse Hart to return at No. 10, and Chris Eubank Jr. gained an extra notch (from No. 9 to No. 7) after three rounds of easy work against an overmatched JJ McDonagh in Jeddah.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Jessie Vargas' draw with Thomas Dulorme (unrated) could've gone either way, but Vargas went decidedly downward on the list, from No. 7 to No. 10. Terence Crawford did the opposite after dismantling Jose Benavidez Jr. (unrated) over 12 rounds en route to a last-minute stoppage. It was a tremendous performance, and one that cemented "Bud" as a true welterweight, but still not quite enough to top Errol Spence's resume at 147, so … Keith "No Time" Thurman, whose inactivity is beyond silly, went from No. 1 to No. 3, Spence went to

ERIC FRANCIS/GETTY IMAGES

Anthony Joshua (right) overcame some rough moments in the early rounds of an entertaining scrap with Alexander Povetkin.

ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the top and Crawford rose from No. 3 to No. 2.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Kiryl Relikh stayed put at No. 4 after narrowly outpointing Eduard Troyanovsky, who fell from No. 6 to No. 9.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Luke Campbell (No. 8 last month) avenged a 2015 loss to Yvan Mendy (No. 9) with an unremarkable unanimous decision and rose a spot on the list. Mendy dropped out and undefeated American Devin Haney came in at No. 10. Jorge Linares (No. 2) moved up to 140 the following week, so everybody shuffled up a notch and Ghana's Emmanuel Tagoe entered at No. 10. Tagoe then gained a rank after the dismissal of No. 8-rated Lewis Ritson, who was upset by Francesco Patera in a European title fight. The split-decision win earned Patera the No. 10 spot.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Dented war horse Jhonny Gonzalez (No. 9 last month) was dropped from the list after losing a majority decision to unrated Tomas Rojas. The resulting vacancy at No. 10 was filled by young Russian Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No. 6-rated Zhanat Zhakiyanov confirmed his retirement after a year of inactivity. He was removed, which created a vacancy at No. 10 for Takuma Inoue, who'd scored a nice win against Mark John Yap (unrated) three weeks earlier. Inoue's older brother Naoya (No. 2 last month) then climbed to No. 1 after his clobbering of Payano. Also, after having been removed for the double controversy of missing weight and failing a drug test (thus soiling the last two fights of ex-champ Shinsuke Yamanaka's career) Luis Nery was allowed back in at No. 5 following a third-round stoppage of Jason Canoy (unrated). The unlucky Payano (No. 5 last month) dropped out in the process.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Jerwin Ancajas kept his title with a draw against Alejandro Barrios (unrated), but was demoted from No. 3 to No. 4 after what should've been an easier fight.

FLYWEIGHTS: At just 23 with only 12 pro fights, Kosei Tanaka (No. 6 last month) became a three-division titleholder with a majority decision over Sho Kimura (No. 5 last month) in a candidate for Fight of the Year. Tanaka rose to No. 2 and Kimura slipped to No. 6.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Hiroto Kyoguchi made his debut at 108 with an impressive stoppage of previously unbeaten Tibo Monabesa (unrated) and was installed at No. 8, pushing out No. 10-rated Randy Petalcorin. Another one of the young guns from Japan, Ken Shiro, rose from No. 2 to No. 1 after a seventh-round stoppage of hard-luck bleeder Milan Melindo, who fell from No. 4 to No. 9. Angel Acosta (No. 6 last month) then ascended to No. 4 with a second-round knockout of Abraham Rodriguez (unrated).

STRAWWEIGHTS: Kyoguchi's upward move vacated the No. 3 spot and everyone below that gained a rank, with Tsubasa Koura getting extra credit – going from No. 9 to No. 7 – after outpointing Daiki Tomita (unrated). Undefeated Filipino Mark Anthony Barriga filled the gap at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)
1 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** U.K. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
2 **DEONTAY WILDER** U.S. • 40-0-0 (39 KOs)
3 **LUIS ORTIZ** Cuba • 29-1-0 (25 KOs)
4 **DILLIAN WHYTE** U.K. • 24-1-0 (17 KOs)
5 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN** Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)
6 **JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 24-2-0 (18 KOs)
7 **TYSON FURY** U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)
8 **DOMINIC BREAZEALE** U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)
9 **ADAM KOWNACKI** U.S. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
10 **JARRELL MILLER** U.S. • 22-0-1 (19 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C **ALEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
1 **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** Latvia • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)
2 **MURAT GASSIEV** Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)
3 **DENIS LEBEDEV** Russia • 31-2-0 (23 KOs)
4 **YUNIER DORTICOS** Cuba • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)
5 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** Poland • 30-1-0 (19 KOs)
6 **MAKSIM VLASOV** Russia • 42-2-0 (25 KOs)
7 **ANDREW TABITI** U.S. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
8 **KEVIN LERENA** S. Africa • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
9 **ILUNGA MAKABU** Congo • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
10 **CONSTANTIN BEJENARU** Moldova • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ** Colombia • 24-0-0 (12 KOs)
2 **DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
3 **ADONIS STEVENSON** Canada • 29-1-1 (24 KOs)
4 **BADOU JACK** Sweden • 22-1-3 (13 KOs)
5 **SERGEY KOVALEV** Russia • 32-3-1 (28 KOs)
6 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** Ukraine • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
7 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 13-0-0 (13 KOs)
8 **SULLIVAN BARRERA** Cuba • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)
9 **MARCUS BROWNE** U.S. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
10 **JOE SMITH JR.** U.S. • 24-2-0 (20 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C **CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
1 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** Mexico • 38-0-0 (25 KOs)
2 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3 **JOSE UZCATEGUI** Venezuela • 28-2-0 (23 KOs)
4 **GEORGE GROVES** U.K. • 28-4-0 (20 KOs)
5 **JAMES DEGALE** U.K. • 25-2-1 (15 KOs)
6 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** U.S. • 32-1-1 (24 KOs)
7 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
8 **CALEB TRUAX** U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)
9 **ROCKY FIELDING** U.K. • 27-1-0 (15 KOs)
10 **JESSE HART** U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Oct. 14, 2018

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 50-1-2 (34 KOs)
- **1** **GENNADY GOLOVKIN** — Kaz. • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3** **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** — Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **JERMALL CHARLO** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **6** **RYOTA MURATA** — Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **8** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** — U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **HASSAN N'DAM** — Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **10** **MACIEJ SULECKI** — Poland • 26-1-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JARRETT HURD** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **2** **JERMELL CHARLO** — U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA** — Cuba • 25-3-2 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA** — Mexico • 31-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO** — Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **MICHEL SORO** — France • 32-2-1 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JULIAN WILLIAMS** — U.S. • 25-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **KELL BROOK** — U.K. • 37-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **9** **AUSTIN TROUT** — U.S. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM SMITH** — U.K. • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE** — U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **KEITH THURMAN** — U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **SHAWN PORTER** — U.S. • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **MANNY PACQUIAO** — Phil. • 60-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7** **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** — Lithuania • 20-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **YORDENIS UGAS** — Cuba • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **JEFF HORN** — Australia • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10** **JESSIE VARGAS** — U.S. • 28-2-2 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS** — U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **2** **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE RAMIREZ** — U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **KIRYL RELIKH** — Belarus • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **5** **VIKTOR POSTOL** — Ukraine • 29-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **6** **MAURICE HOOKER** — U.S. • 24-0-3 (16 KOs)
- **7** **SERGEY LIPINETS** — Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **IVAN BARANCHYK** — Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** — Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **10** **ANTONIO OROZCO** — U.S. • 27-1-0 (17 KOs)

Jose Benavidez Jr. (right) was tougher than many expected, but the unrated welterweight was still outclassed by Terence Crawford.

Lightweight contender Luke Campbell (left) avenged the first loss of his professional career by dominating Yvan Mendy over 12 rounds.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **1** **MIKEY GARCIA** — U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2** **ROBERT EASTER** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE PEDRAZA** — P.R. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **RICHARD COMMEY** — Ghana • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **5** **ANTHONY CROLLA** — U.K. • 33-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **6** **LUKE CAMPBELL** — U.K. • 19-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **RAYMUNDO BELTRAN** — Mexico • 35-8-1 (21 KOs)
- **8** **LEWIS RITSON** — U.K. • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **DEVIN HANEY** — U.S. • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **FRANCESCO PATERA** — Belgium • 20-3-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** — Mexico • 34-1-0 (30 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** — U.S. • 20-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **3** **ALBERTO MACHADO** — P.R. • 20-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4** **TEVIN FARMER** — U.S. • 26-4-1 (5 KOs)
- **5** **FRANCISCO VARGAS** — Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
- **6** **MIGUEL ROMAN** — Mexico • 60-12-0 (47 KOs)
- **7** **MASAYUKI ITO** — Japan • 24-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **8** **JEZREEL CORRALES** — Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** — Mexico • 27-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **10** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** — Russia • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **LEO SANTA CRUZ** — U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** — U.S. • 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **CARL FRAMPTON** — U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **OSCAR VALDEZ** — Mexico • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **5** **ABNER MARES** — Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JOSH WARRINGTON** — U.K. • 27-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** — U.S. • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **LEE SELBY** — U.K. • 26-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SCOTT QUIGG** — U.K. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
- **10** **JESUS ROJAS** — P.R. • 26-2-2 (19 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ISAAC DOGBOE** — Ghana • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **2** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** — Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **REY VARGAS** — Mexico • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4** **DANIEL ROMAN** — U.S. • 26-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **5** **JESSIE MAGDALENO** — U.S. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **DIEGO DE LA HOYA** — Mexico • 21-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **7** **TJ DOHENY** — Australia • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA** — Japan • 35-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** — Mexico • 25-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **10** **RYOSUKE IWASA** — Japan • 25-3-0 (16 KOs)

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RATINGS

Through fights of Oct. 14, 2018

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
3 **RYAN BURNETT**
U.K. • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)
4 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
P.R. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
5 **LUIS NERY**
Mexico • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6 **LIBORIO SOLIS**
Venezuela • 27-5-1 (12 KOs)
7 **LEE HASKINS**
U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)
8 **JASON MOLONEY**
Australia • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
9 **NORDINE OUBAALI**
France • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
10 **TAKUMA INOUE**
Japan • 12-0-0 (3 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)
1 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 37-3-0 (25 KOs)
2 **KHALID YAFAI**
U.K. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
3 **KAZUTO IOKA**
Japan • 23-1-0 (13 KOs)
4 **JERWIN ANCAJAS**
Phil. • 30-1-2 (20 KOs)
5 **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
6 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
Australia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
7 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 41-1-5 (23 KOs)
8 **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
U.S. • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
9 **ASTON PALICTE**
Philippines • 24-2-1 (20 KOs)
10 **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
P.R. • 17-4-0 (14 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MORUTI MTHALANE**
S. Africa • 36-2-0 (24 KOs)
2 **KOSEI TANAKA**
Japan • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ARTEM DALAKIAN**
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
4 **ANDREW SELBY**
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)
5 **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
Nicaragua • 28-3-0 (19 KOs)
6 **SHO KIMURA**
Japan • 17-2-2 (10 KOs)
7 **MASAYUKI KURODA**
Japan • 30-7-3 (16 KOs)
8 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
Mexico • 28-4-1 (20 KOs)
9 **VINCENT LEGRAND**
France • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)
10 **WENFENG GE**
China • 11-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C **HEKKIE BUDLER**
S. Africa • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
1 **KEN SHIRO**
Japan • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **RYOICHI TAGUCHI**
Japan • 27-3-2 (12 KOs)
3 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
4 **ANGEL ACOSTA**
P.R. • 19-1-0 (19 KOs)
5 **FELIX ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)
6 **GANIGAN LOPEZ**
Mexico • 34-8-0 (19 KOs)
7 **HIROTO KYOGUCHI**
Japan • 11-0-0 (8 KOs)
8 **REY LORETO**
Phil. • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)
9 **MILAN MELINDO**
Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
10 **EDWARD HENO**
Phil. • 13-0-5 (5 KOs)

Nayoa Inoue (left) lived up to his "Monster" moniker by blasting Juan Carlos Payano out in the first round of their WBSS bantamweight quarterfinal bout.

In his first fight of the WBSS bantamweight tournament, Zolani Tete (left) defended his WBO title with a competitive unanimous decision over Mikhail Aloyan.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
Thailand • 51-0-0 (18 KOs)
2 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **BYRON ROJAS**
Nicaragua • 25-3-3 (11 KOs)
4 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 18-3-0 (10 KOs)
5 **SIMPHIWE KHONCO**
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
6 **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
Mexico • 22-4-1 (13 KOs)
7 **TSUBASA KOURA**
Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
8 **TATSUYA FUKUHARA**
Japan • 21-6-6 (7 KOs)
9 **DEEJAY KRIEL**
S. Africa • 14-1-1 (6 KOs)
10 **MARK ANTHONY BARRIGA**
Philippines • 9-0-0 (1 KO)

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

AN ERA HAS ENDED WITH HBO'S DEPARTURE FROM BOXING, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF REASONS TO BE OPTIMISTIC GOING INTO 2019

By **Evan Rutkowski**

(Top to bottom) Anthony Joshua, Aleksandr Usyk, Vasiliy Lomachenko and Naoya Inoue will all be players in the new landscape of boxing.

The number of entities broadcasting high-level boxing has doubled in the past few years, and even with HBO's exit from the sport, 2019 will be a great year for fans because of the competition between networks. Hardcore fans, especially those who saw HBO thrive during an earlier time, have complained for years about certain issues that came out of the sport's pay cable TV era: uneven matchups, little accountability from the cable network's high-powered executives and alliances that more often than not prevented big fights from happening. Boxing fans were understandably frustrated. To all those fans who wanted competition, now you've got it.

What does network competition look like? To fans used to some of the more cynical aspects of boxing, there might be negative connotations, but there are many more positive aspects this time around. While there will certainly be more boxing in 2019, there will also likely be better boxing. The new year could produce consistent quality matchups on network TV, cable and streaming services, and the fights could come at the same price or even cheaper than what fans are used to paying. Let's take a deeper look as to what factors are causing this to happen, and why it's taking place right now.

Perhaps the most significant positive development for boxing as a televised sport in 2018 was the notable success ESPN had in selling advertising against the live sport. It worked so well that they amended their initial four-year agreement with Top Rank and committed to seven years. Fox and FS1 have also entered the sport at a high level, signing a four-year deal with Al Haymon's Premier Boxing Champions, with the first card airing at the end of December. These deals are massively different from the time-buy approach that PBC had several years earlier in that they have networks paying a license fee, which has forced them to sell advertising against the live product. The accountability is real and rests

much more on consumer satisfaction than it ever did at HBO or Showtime, because the advertisers will surely stop spending money if viewers turn away. Noteworthy for fans of the sport is that Fox is free, and both ESPN and FS1 are typically available in lower-cost cable or streaming packages.

While pay cabler Showtime and streaming services DAZN and ESPN+ aren't free, to anyone who subscribes just for boxing, they are cost neutral now that HBO has exited the game. DAZN is $10 a month and ESPN+ $5, adding up to the same monthly cost as HBO. As one looks at their offerings, it's hard to think there won't be more value in keeping a Showtime subscription and replacing HBO with DAZN and ESPN+. Showtime has looked to maintain its leadership in the sport by increasing spending, per its chief, Stephen Espinoza. This is good news for fans, as Showtime's matchmaking was strong in 2018, finally forcing some interesting fights for the PBC talent who faced softer matchups in previous years.

DAZN claims to spend more money than anyone else, and we certainly have seen some good early signs. Even before their deal with Golden Boy and Canelo, they had fun matchmaking, the WBSS and access to high-quality U.K. fights, including Anthony Joshua vs. Alexander Povetkin and Aleksandr Usyk vs. Tony Bellew, which all bodes well for 2019.

Perhaps just as important for fans is Eddie Hearn's pledge to include PPV-level cards in the monthly price of DAZN. ESPN+ has already offered matchups like Manny Pacquiao vs. Lucas Matthysse and Terence Crawford vs. Jeff Horn, which almost certainly would have cost $70 on pay-per-view had HBO been the distributor. While all fights that would traditionally do over 500,000 PPV buys may not be eliminated in this fight economy, we've already seen lots of evidence that airing what were previously lower-level pay-per-view fights is starting to work as part of the streaming service strategy. Certainly every fight involving Canelo

MORE REASONS TO SMILE

Evan Rutkowski explained why the plethora of top-class boxing shows on multiple platforms – premium cable (Showtime), basic cable (ESPN), broadcast network (Fox), and streaming services (DAZN and ESPN+) – should result in the kind of competition that will raise the bar in quality matchups next year. In keeping with Rutkowski's glass-half-full theme, The Ring's editors came up with eight other reasons to look forward to 2019:

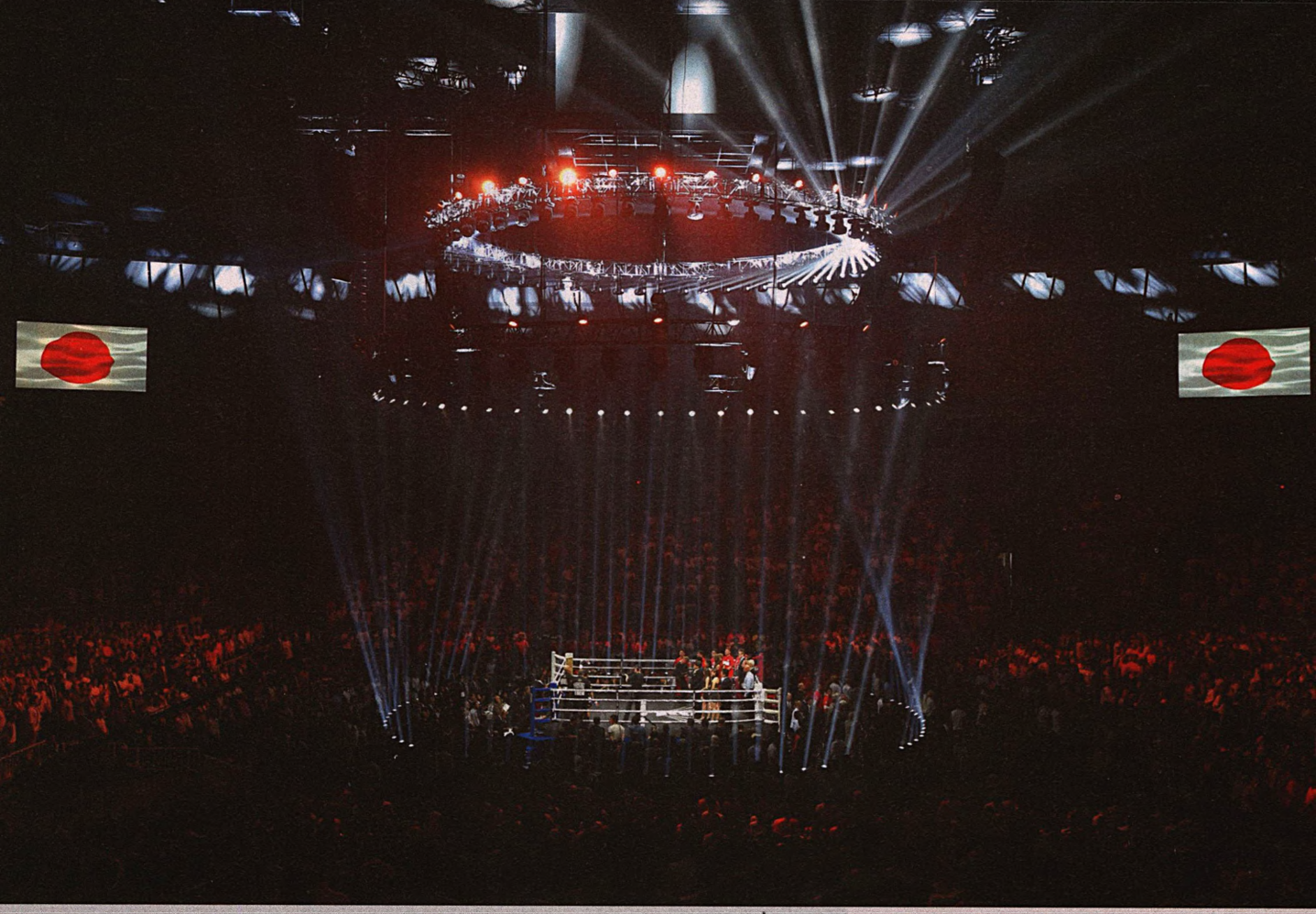
- **THE WORLD BOXING SUPER SERIES –** Get this: There's a successful tournament format that is forcing the fractured, adversarial and chaotic boxing business to behave like a professional sport. Who'd have thunk it? This year we've seen two Ring champions crowned from Season 1 – Aleksandr Usyk at cruiserweight and Callum Smith at super middleweight. The best are fighting the best, real champions are being crowned and potential stars are coming to the forefront in often-overlooked divisions. In 2019, the winners of the bantamweight and junior welterweight finals for Season 2 will also be recognized as the very best in their respective divisions, and pound-for-pound designation may also be possible (for those not already there). With minimal road bumps in its first year, the WBSS is working like a charm. Long may it continue.

- **FREEDOM FOR GENNADY GOLOVKIN –** The former middleweight champ's two showdowns with Canelo Alvarez produced the best, albeit most controversial, superfights in boxing over the last year. However, until recently, the landscape for the HBO star looked limited due to his affiliation with the network. That changed when HBO announced that they were pulling the plug on their boxing coverage, and now the options for GGG are vast. There's a plethora of network and streaming deals available for the pound-for-pound entrant, and potential matchups within the fertile 160- and 168-pound divisions have increased dramatically. Golovkin vs. Jermall Charlo, Callum Smith, Demetrius Andrade, a rematch with Daniel Jacobs. You wouldn't mind some of that in 2019, would you? And then there's the very real possibility of Canelo vs. GGG III.

- **ONE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP –** In 2018, we had Anthony Joshua vs. Joseph Parker and Alexander Povetkin. We also had Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz. Before the year finishes, we'll have had Wilder vs. Tyson Fury and, hopefully by that point we'll know the matchup that will crown an undisputed champion in the glamour division. British superstar Joshua is on top as IBF, WBA and WBO titleholder. Wilder is his hard-hitting WBC counterpart. The enigmatic Fury, as yet unproven on his comeback trail, still retains lineal status. All three men are unbeaten, but that will change when Wilder and Fury collide on December 1 in L.A. Joshua is already booked in for April 13 at Wembley Stadium, with a Dillian Whyte rematch possible, but let's hope there's only one heavyweight champ left standing before 2019 ends.

- **THE BATTLE FOR POUND-FOR-POUND –** The once-great Manny Pacquiao is still around, now apparently bound for PBC, but on a slow fade. The once-great Floyd Mayweather is still in retirement, and the majority of us hope he stays there. Cue the latest superstars who are all vying for that mythical pound-for-pound mantle: Vasiliy Lomachenko, Terence Crawford, Usyk, Canelo, Naoya Inoue, Mikey Garcia, and the list goes on – an assortment of elite-level talents, and every one of them stationed in a different weight class. Three-division titleholder Lomachenko, currently the Ring lightweight champion, is the best on the planet right now, but the others are biting at his super-quick feet, and the landscape could be vastly different by the end of 2019. Boxing, as always, has plenty to brag about, and it's the fans who will benefit.

- **LAND OF THE RISING SONS –** "What's that coming over the hill, is it a monster?" You better believe it. The meteoric rise of multi-weight titleholder Naoya Inoue was the final push needed to bring Japan into boxing's forefront. "The Monster" recently made his debut in the WBSS, consuming former titleholder Juan Carlos Payano in just 70 seconds.



The World Boxing Super Series has brought a new look and new life — along with real champions — to the scene.

This lethal pound-for-pound entrant also has a plethora of championship henchmen looking to back him up: Ken Shiro (WBC junior flyweight), Kosei Tanaka (WBO flyweight) and Masayuki Ito (WBO junior lightweight). This type of success is no flash in the pan. Japan is here to stay, and the country's fistic evolution will continue in 2019.

- **LADIES FIRST –** In September, history was made for both the women's game and this publication when boxing's "First Lady," Cecilia Braekhus, became the first female fighter to be awarded a Ring Magazine (pound-for-pound) belt. The undisputed welterweight champion is leading the way in women's boxing, but a host of terrific talent is in hot pursuit to claim her throne. After just six professional fights, two-time Olympic gold medalist Claressa Shields is the IBF/WBC super middleweight and IBF/WBA middleweight titleholder, and Ireland's Katie Taylor holds two belts at lightweight. Both women are undefeated, as is Christina Hammer, whose total-unification middleweight bout with Shields was postponed, and Britain's Nicola Adams, another double Olympic champion, who should be contesting for a world title in the very near future. The year 2018 was standout for women's boxing and, with the talent pool continuing to swell in most divisions, the future looks very bright.

- **FUTURE FISTS –** A host of new and exciting fighters burst onto the world championship scene in 2018. In April, Ghana's Isaac Dogboe got off the floor to knock out Jessie Magdaleno in the 11th round of a classic. In May, young Mexican power-puncher Jaime Munguia destroyed Sadam Ali in four rounds to win the WBO junior middleweight title. The aforementioned Callum Smith lived up to his previous hype when he scored a seventh-round knockout of fellow Englishman George Groves in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in September. Three newly crowned titleholders from three different continents highlight the amazing global talent that continues to grace the sport. Mix in fast-rising prospects like Teofimo Lopez, Vergil Ortiz, Devin Haney, Shakur Stevenson and Joshua Buatsi, and it's clear that boxing is on a serious upswing.

- **BEST OF THE BEST –** The reality of four main sanctioning organizations make it extremely difficult to crown an undisputed champion in any division. We have two at present (Usyk and Braekhus). However, the best are fighting the best with more frequency and, in the wake of Canelo-Golovkin II, we can hopefully look forward to some other serious matchups across a variety of weight classes. If 2019 produces any of the following fights, nobody would be asking for their money back: Anthony Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder, Jarrett Hurd vs. Jermell Charlo, Regis Prograis vs. Josh Taylor, Leo Santa Cruz vs. Gary Russell Jr., Naoya Inoue vs. Zolani Tete, Hekkie Budler vs. Ken Shiro, Claressa Shields vs. Christina Hammer or Cecilia Braekhus vs. Katie Taylor. More than one of these collisions are miles away from becoming reality, but all of them are possible. Let's look on the bright side.

will be off PPV for the next few years. If this continues to regularly be part of both streaming services offering, then the future is brighter and cheaper for core fans.

Another important factor that streaming services and Showtime Anytime (the cable network's app) all bring to the table is the first-party data they provide, something HBO never had. This hasn't been talked about much in the boxing press, but it gives fight fans more power and keeps network execs more accountable than any other time in the sport's history. Networks will no longer be reliant on a Nielsen rating to see who watches the fights. They can now see exactly how many people watch undercards and main events for all cards, and even get granular data, such as when people paused or skipped parts of certain matchups or whether they watched the fight live. They can link a fighter's popularity to subscriptions – for example, ESPN+ surely knows how many people signed up for the service in the week leading up to Pacquiao's fight, and then which of those new subscribers watched him perform. DAZN will see a similar data with Canelo.

All of these factors have led not just to more boxing available to consumers, but they've started to force networks to televise better product. It's a fierce competition that has been ramping up, and the fall/winter season of 2018 has been a sneak preview of what's likely to come. Major fight cards were broadcast on a network or streaming platform almost every weekend from September 8 through October 27. On some weekends, there were multiple fight cards offering either star fighters or solid matchups, and major shows are scheduled on every weekend through December 22. This sheer volume of boxing means that in order to stand out, the marketplace will require sought-after matchups, and we're starting to see evidence of promoters working hard to make this happen. Purse bids, once forgotten sanctioning body deadlines for mandatory title bouts that rarely meant much in the HBO/Showtime era, now can be used to truly force the numbers upward. When Top Rank outbid DAZN to win the Maurice Hooker-Alex Saucedo WBO 140-pound title fight, both promotional companies bid over $1.5 million for a matchup that just a few years ago would have gone for a fraction of that. It likely won't be an isolated incident either, as astute managers and promoters will continue to pursue ways to bring these kinds of paydays for their fighters. Fans will reap the rewards too, as purse bids like these will encourage better fights happening sooner.

HBO still had some solid inventory, talent-wise, as it left the boxing business, and we've seen bidding wars erupt as promoters have looked for new networks. Canelo was the most highly sought-after free agent in recent memory and signed the largest deal in all of sports, and Gennady Golovkin has had no shortage of suitors as well. The Eleider Alvarez-Sergey Kovalev rematch saw Top Rank use its war chest from ESPN to acquire the broadcast rights to a matchup involving fighters it doesn't promote, an excellent signal to those who see network divides as an added barrier to giving the fans top matchups.

The lingering question will be if the biggest fights in the sport can get made. Alvarez-Kovalev 2 is one thing, but can the networks come together to make Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Mikey Garcia, Crawford vs. Errol Spence, or Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder? The good news is that the overall amount of money in the sport has increased enough that the answer should be yes.

Broadcast platforms must deliver quality fights in 2019 to appease their subscribers and justify high license fees, and the crucial challenge will be in making the "superbouts" between elite boxers who fight on different networks – such as Vasiliy Lomachenko (ESPN) vs. Mikey Garcia (Showtime/Fox) and Terence Crawford (ESPN) vs. Errol Spence (Showtime/Fox).

Combine that with an overall increase in the regularity of quality fight cards, and consumers might prefer to watch better-matched fights over stars continuing to dominate lesser competition. While that surely doesn't guarantee that these big fights will get made, 2019 offers a much better chance that they will than years past.

The timing of all the deals puts the pressure on everyone involved to make an impact in 2019. DAZN and Fox will be in the first full year of their contracts with Eddie Hearn and PBC, respectively, and ESPN will enter their first full year of a revamped contract with Top Rank. Showtime will also want to maintain its leadership with an increased budget. Given the sheer volume of boxing available to the consumer at a reasonable price, no one can afford to lag behind. All of these platforms will be heavily incentivized to put on their best product in an attempt to break through the clutter. Waiting until 2020 or 2021 to put on the bigger fights will be of little value to networks as consumers have a variety of options, and by then the winners and losers from all of these deals may have already emerged. Consumers will see some short-term benefit from this, and they can look forward to a year that should provide them some of the best action they've seen in a while.

Evan Rutkowski is a former HBO Sports marketing executive and host of the Fistianados Podcast on the Leave It In The Ring radio network, which looks at the business side of boxing. His Twitter feed is @fistianadospod.

THE SCIENCE OF WINNING

ANTHONY JOSHUA IS STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS, BUT THE EFFORT TO MAKE HIM UNDISPUTED CHAMPION IS UNLIKE ANYTHING SEEN BEFORE IN BOXING

By **Gareth A Davies**

Anthony Joshua's eyes may be fixed on a reservation at Wembley Stadium on April 13 and the ultimate prize of becoming undisputed heavyweight champion, but there were enough troubling moments against 39-year-old Russian challenger Alexander Povetkin at the same venue on September 22 that both the fighter and his team have a reason to pause for thought. Joshua's vulnerabilities were writ large in the teeming rain in London as he weathered a crisis in the early rounds: His nose was broken and bloodied in the first, he absorbed too many right hands and hooks, his left lead was hung low and he failed to use his height and reach at times. Yet his record stands: 22 fights, 22 victories.

Afterward, Joshua identified his ideal next three fights. "In order, I'd like Deontay Wilder, Tyson Fury and then Dillian Whyte," said the 28-year-old, who retained his IBF, WBA and WBO titles.

We know that Joshua is defensively flawed, wide open at times, and Povetkin, experienced and smart, exploited it. In the same scenario against Wilder, it is not difficult to envision the British fighter being knocked out. In a matchup with Fury – or at least the version of Fury who took from

PHOTOGRAPGH BY RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY IMAGES

Anthony Joshua's victory over Russian veteran Alexander Povetkin did not come easy, but the scrutinized heavyweight star showed, once again, that he can tame adversity.

Joshua's cutting-edge training methods and his steely resolve are a potent combination on fight night.

Wladimir Klitschko the three belts that Joshua now holds – there could come an embarrassing boxing lesson. But the excitement remains, as does the building of a heavyweight behemoth in terms of fan interest and the financial lucre that continues to be generated. More than 300,000 paying fans have attended his last four fights, all in stadiums.

Joshua emerged into Wembley in that white robe, echoing Muhammad Ali, looking so relaxed. He shadowboxed his way to the ring on a hydraulic lift. The roar accompanied Joshua's entire ringwalk. Spumes of fire exploded around him, but this is now a familiar trip down Wembley way, soundtracked to the chant of "O, Anthon-eeee Joshu-ua." He raised a white-gloved hand to friends and family sitting ringside.

Povetkin stalked the ring, ready to face a fellow Olympic gold medalist.

Predictably, it was a cagey start as they felt each other out, a "tranquil war" until Povetkin exploded with a three-punch combination that clearly buckled the Briton late in the opener. The first four rounds felt a little like Russian roulette. There was more animated talk in the corner between rounds than we have ever witnessed from trainer Rob McCracken. Joshua needed it. Having been dipped by the Russian's hooks at the end of that first round, leaving his nose injured, Joshua was acutely aware of the danger of the older, more experienced challenger moving in smartly.

Yet after taking the dangerous Povetkin's best shots, Joshua grew in confidence and finished in style. The titleholder's left hook, straight right-hand combination buckled Povetkin and sent him to the canvas in Round 7. The Russian climbed groggily to his feet, but Joshua took him to task once more, same combination, crumpling him like clothes falling into a suitcase for a second time.

Heavyweight boxing is about knockouts, and Joshua was brutal in overpowering Povetkin in that seventh period. When referee Steve Gray stepped in between them to rescue the challenger, the huge crowd erupted to celebrate the undefeated British boxing hero. Joshua had been down 4-2 on my card – not so with the judges, strangely.

"I will always knock them down, one by one, but people have to be patient," said Joshua in the aftermath. "I'm happy Wilder and Fury are fighting, and good luck to both of them. I have no interest in who wins. I'll fight both of them."

However, promoter Eddie Hearn was clear about the prospect of a Joshua-Fury fight, in the event that the former Ring champion defeats Wilder to claim the WBC crown at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on December 1. "Being British, we would want Fury to win that fight, but in terms of April, Deontay Wilder must win that fight if that's going to happen," said Hearn. "And we're not willing to wait until December – a deal must be in place well in advance."

Hearn believes the Wilder fight is the obvious thriller: "I don't want to be disrespectful, but Tyson Fury is the most unentertaining fighter I've ever seen. He's never been in a good fight in his whole career."

Even Joshua was quick to land a few jabs of his own: "[Fury] is a spoiler. He likes to spoil a fight – and he could definitely spoil it. Ultimately it could look rubbish for 12 rounds, but as long as you knock someone out, [the crowd is happy]. That's what you've got to do – deliver that knockout punch. That's what people want to see."

There is so much at stake every time Joshua fights. Millions watched at home in the U.K. and in the United States, where the Briton with the Adonis-like physique was making his first appearance on the streaming network DAZN, the platform a part of the network owned by Ukraine-born billionaire Sir Len Blavatnik. The U.S. market matters. It is the next for Joshua to conquer.

Joshua earned £20 million (about $26 million) for his night's work – the Russian headed back east with £6 million (a little under $8 million) in his bank account. Joshua knew that he had to be at his best against the shorter, powerful, tank-like build of the man known as "The White Lion."

Behind the British fighter, the machine is extraordinary. An industry in itself, almost. The team of sports scientists around Joshua is looking to create any advantage, however minute,

in the mega-events ahead. As Klitschko did, time and again, Joshua opens his training camp to the media for one day in the week before the fight. From those glimpses comes an unmatched degree of analysis.

The 6-foot-6, 245-pound fighter prepared for the defense against Povetkin under intense scrutiny, with details such as the power of the light bulbs around him being tailored for his focus. Sleep monitoring, injury prevention, reaction training and fatigue analysis all add to the margins in making victory more attainable. Ian Gatt, Joshua's physiotherapist at the English Institute of Sport (EIS) in Sheffield, told me he reckons that Joshua is "the most studied boxer of all time." Gatt, who works in a team underlying all of Great Britain's Olympic combat sports squads in the most successful period in the nation's history at the Games, explained: "AJ is lucky, in a way. He's surrounded by a lot of practitioners who are involved in their own right in elite sport. I've been working 10 years in the system for GB. AJ has all that knowledge at his fingertips from us."

Joshua may walk into the ring alone and fight opponents alone, but everything he achieves is assisted by a large backroom staff. "Between the warm-up, the cool-down, the nutritionist and the analyst who looks at the number of rounds and velocity, we're using every statistic available and discussing them closely," said Gatt. "We're looking at them day in, day out, and we're taking them every session. We know from them how to monitor his load, change certain things on the day based on his fatigue levels, and we have an outstanding overall picture of his body, his mind and his wellness. I've known AJ since 2010; I know his body inside-out. I know which areas we need to focus on. We use all our knowledge to keep him in one piece."

Mark Ellison, Joshua's nutritionist, explained the use of a Witty (wireless timing trainer) system that uses an array of cameras to record the fighter's movements as he punches at randomly flashing lights. "We use it mostly for reaction times and decision-making by the fighter. We can set up a protocol where you're reacting to just a light [punching at the cameras]. It doesn't replace sparring, but it's something that's measurable and repeatable every day.

"It's all part of our physical load and wellness monitoring. We were monitoring his sleep patterns and his mood, but we've deemphasized that now, because we cracked it. His sleep is definitely something that's good. We've got these little bulbs for the flat, relaxed lights for the evening and bright lights for the day so it can wake you up."

Another member of the team, Chris Connelly, a performance analyst at the EIS, explained how all of Joshua's punches in training are monitored. "It's just one measurement we use to track him through his training. The most important thing is getting that information to pass onto the team and track over-training, under-training and potential risk of injury.

"We're one step ahead. Because it's so important to make AJ as strong and fast as he can be, we need as much information to inform the experts. That way we know where he's at and understand him better."

There are also three control center "stations" at the gym inside the EIS. "The big thing about these performance analyst stations are for Anthony to come to us after he's sparred and watch it," explains Connelly. "That's massive. We call it the learning cycle. It's about closing the loop – getting ready to train, training and then finishing training by watching it. If you walk out of the ring, you're not getting the best out of it. AJ can watch it back.

"The biggest part of my job is actually [analyzing the opponent]. Counting the number of punches, analyzing his punches, his combinations, what he goes to under pressure, what combinations he throws when a certain opponent does something – just really getting a rounded view of opponents like Povetkin. Every week, I feed information to Rob McCracken, Joshua's trainer, who is the expert, and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent in videos. Joshua's training can then be geared to it. It massively helps with picking the sparring partners as well. We analyze Povetkin or any other opponent and then analyze potential sparring opponents to make sure they can replicate the opponent." It all adds up to a modern fighting machine, even if Joshua is not the most fluent boxer to grace the division.

The day after the big night, there were the usual claims and counter-claims from the various factions in the U.K., with rival promoters Frank Warren and Barry Hearn, Eddie's father, squabbling over potential purses on the radio airwaves while Fury blocked Joshua on Twitter after being trolled by the Wembley victor. It all points toward a reckoning point in the division, and we would all prefer it sooner rather than later. The truth is somewhere in the middle, and may take longer to play out.

"Joshua-Wilder could be one of the biggest fights in all-time boxing history," Eddie Hearn believes. "It would definitely be the biggest fight in British boxing history, because it would eclipse Joshua-Klitschko. We don't rule out a fight in America either.

"I do believe we're only scratching the surface of how big Joshua-Wilder could be, but we also live in an age where fans want everything now, and we also live in a heavyweight division where someone might lose. Joshua wants to be the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, and we want that fight now."

The boxing world deserves transparency now, and it will all come down to clear negotiations, honesty and a loosening of egos. April 2019 at Wembley Stadium would be the perfect moment. Joshua-Wilder or Joshua-Fury. Make it happen, gentlemen. The time is now. RING

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent of the London Telegraph.

THE HEART OF BOXING

BELOVED PROMOTER, MATCHMAKER AND MENTOR **DON CHARGIN** LEFT HIS LEGACY IN THE COUNTLESS PEOPLE GRACED BY WORKING WITH HIM AND HIS WIFE, LORRAINE

By **Norm Frauenheim**

The memories are everywhere, and they endure like footprints cast in stone. Don Chargin left them there throughout his 90 years as a bucket guy, promoter and matchmaker. Mostly, he left them as a friend to a business that wouldn't be as lively or as resilient or much of anything else without him.

Chargin is gone, dead on September 28. He was called "War A Week" because his matchmaking won over the public with the bouts he made every Thursday for the better part of two decades at the fabled Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. But he couldn't beat cancer, one foe that has never been counted out.

Yet, boxing moves on. It survives, and we assume it always will. It's a safe assumption, in large part because of what Chargin did, how he did it and who he knew.

His was life as a legacy, but there are no legacies without passion for the day-to-day routine and an unwavering commitment to the long haul. Chargin was there every day. He went the distance. In the beginning and in the end, he was a boxing guy. From stitches to scars, he loved every bloody bit of it.

He is missed, to be sure, mostly because he became an elder statesman in a polarized game so often fractured by long-standing grudges, insults, rival networks and promoters who won't do business with each other. In the end, Chargin had no enemies in a sport known to be full of them. There were only friends and admirers who wanted

From "Wonder Boy" to "War A Week" to one of boxing's most respected elder statesmen, Don Chargin's career as matchmaker, promoter and consultant spanned nearly 70 years.

to be like him, or at least do business with the fairness and grace he brought to the tough trade.

"Outside of my own family, Don was the best friend I've ever had," said Bill Caplan, the longtime publicist who has worked for all of the rival promoters.

It was a friendship that must have been tested over the years. Boxing would not have been called a red-light district if the neighborhood wasn't full of schemers, corruption and more.

"Don was feisty, especially in his earlier days" said Top Rank matchmaker Bruce Trampler, whose old mentor used to call him "Little War."

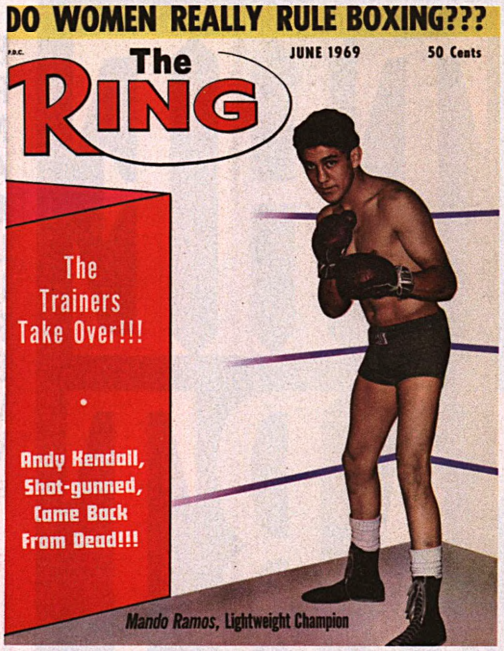
Feisty is mandatory in the boxing business. Call it a survival instinct. Google Bob Arum, who learned from Chargin in his early days as a promoter, and you'll see feisty mentioned often enough to be redundant.

Yet Chargin emerged from those inevitable conflicts with his passion for boxing still very much intact. His heart was always in it, even though there were times it got broken. Literally.

In his later years, Chargin loved to talk about Mando Ramos, a lightweight champion at 20 years old and a sensation at the Olympic in the mid-1960s and early '70s. Hollywood stars and starlets were among his fans. Rich and poor, Ramos drew huge crowds. There was even a word, "Mandomania," for the buzz he created.

But Ramos' lifestyle got in the way. He partied. He drugged. He drank. Increasingly, his behavior became erratic. Caplan, who worked for the Olympic, recalls that Ramos, who died in 2008, had missed several news conferences, weigh-ins and other scheduled appearances.

For several months in 1970, Chargin worried about where Mando Ramos was and whether he would show up. Suddenly, Chargin began complaining of chest pains. Caplan said that Hall of Famer Aileen Eaton, then the Olympic's promoter, got Chargin to



L.A. lightweight sensation Mando Ramos was one of Chargin's favorites.

go to a nearby Los Angeles hospital.

He got there just in time.

Chargin was suffering a heart attack, Caplan said.

Yet, years later, that Chargin heart was still full of fondness for Mando Ramos, who won a split decision in 1970 in a Ramos-versus-Ramos fight; Mando beat Sugar in a bout as memorable as any at the old Olympic, now a church.

Among Chargin's many stories, Mando Ramos was a reference point. He remembered him as a fighter who had the potential to be one of history's greatest, regardless of weight. He talked about Ramos with a sense of resignation. If only he could have changed his lifestyle. If only. Boxing is full of the stories that end in "if only."

But the optimist – perhaps that heart – in Chargin always led to talk about Mando Ramos' lifestyle choices as an example of what to guard against. Chargin liked him as a character. That was part of the attraction. But he liked him even more as a fighter. If Mando Ramos could be an example for other fighters – even one – then it would be a better sport, a better business.

That unshakable optimism, perhaps, was part of what kept Chargin at ringside for most of his life. He boxed in high school, but was forced to quit because of injury.

Yet he hung around the gym carrying buckets, holding mitts and mops. In 1945, he got licensed as a cornerman. At 23 years old, he was licensed as a promoter and matchmaker. On September 3, 1951, he promoted his first fight, Eddie Chavez's rematch victory over former bantamweight champion Manuel Ortiz in Santa Clara, California. He remembered partying with Ortiz until 6 a.m. the night before opening bell. Ortiz still went the 10-round distance.

"I made money and had a lot fun," Chargin once recalled. "I thought to myself: This is easy."

It didn't take long for him to discover that it never was. The job humbled him, mostly because there was so much he could never control.

"You've got to be lucky," Chargin was fond of saying.

He learned it throughout his long run as a matchmaker for Jimmy Dundee at the Oakland Auditorium in the late 1950s and early '60s. Then it was off to Los Angeles and the Olympic as Eaton's matchmaker from 1964 through 1984. Then there were big fights and bigger crowds in Sacramento on cards featuring two-division titleholder Tony Lopez and others.

A couple weeks before he passed, Chargin was still working as a Golden Boy Promotions adviser, a mentor for Eric Gomez. Chargin was there in the beginning for Golden Boy's transformation of Canelo Alvarez from contender into pay-per-view stardom. He watched Canelo win a decision over Gennady Golovkin on September 15 while battling cancer at home in Cambria, California. Thirteen days later, he was gone after a seven-decade career as promoter and matchmaker, mentor and father figure for more than 3,000 cards and 40 world champions.

"Smartest man in boxing," Caplan says of a man who is a

legend in part because of that unprecedented resume in a sport old enough to be ancient.

But he also was very lucky. He'd tell you that. Lady Luck came his way in 1957 when he met Lorraine Adrienne Le Francois, who was a banquet manager for an Oakland hotel where Don staged public workouts for fighters on Dundee's cards.

Initially, Lorraine was unhappy at the language and locker room behavior from some of the fighters. Chargin decided to make peace. He invited her to a fight.

"She told me, 'I can pay my own way,'" Chargin recalled.

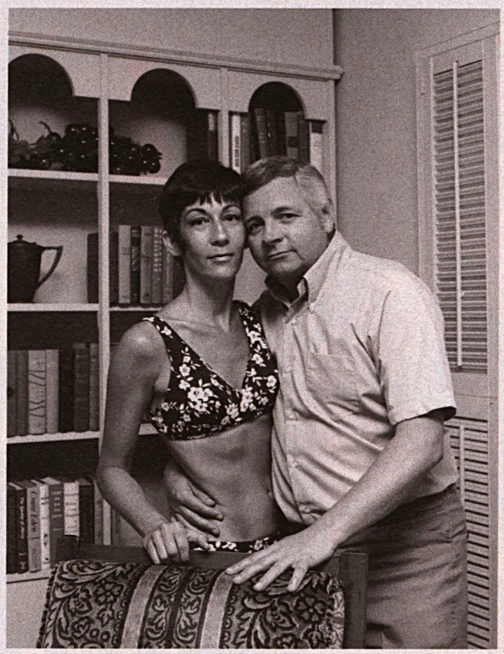
As it turned out, her comment was a sign of things to come. Weeks later, Chargin invited Lorraine to a car show he was promoting in the Bay Area. He and a friend were caring for a group of 150 deaf kids. Chargin wondered what might happen. That's when he suddenly watched Lorraine take control with abundant energy, skill and compassion. She knew sign language. She was proficient in a lot of languages, including French and Spanish. She could speed-read text and read people just as quickly.

Chargin fell in love.

He married Lorraine in 1960 and it proved to be a marriage of a man and woman who complemented each other in almost every possible way. They were partners in life and business, a one-two combination as effective as any matchmaking-and-promotional partnership in the business.

Lorraine understood business and Chargin understood boxing. Together, they sustained fans and fighters for 20 years at the Olympic and then in Sacramento with cards that rocked small rooms and arenas alike. At one level, they became the mom-and-pop of boxing. That's a little misleading, because the label suggests their partnership was just a small business. But they were a lot more than the corner grocery store.

"They did all of those world title fights before huge crowds in Sacramento in the 1980s and '90s," said Trampler, who counts Chargin among the many matchmakers who influenced him, along with the famed Teddy Brenner of Madison Square Garden. "Those were very big shows."



Lorraine and Don Chargin were partners in both marriage and business for 50 years.

The mom-and-pop angle is appropriate for the way they approached fighters, pushy promoters and wannabes. Don was the paternalistic dad who worried about where his fighters were and if they were ready. Lorraine – who, remember, once told Chargin she could pay her own way – was the demanding mom who was not going to give away the house. Famously, she once told Don King to buy a ticket when he tried to get himself and his entourage into a Lennox Lewis fight at Sacramento's Arco Arena for free.

Their marriage – and its impact on boxing – lasted for 50 years. Half a century. On April 6, 2010, Lorraine died, also from cancer. She was 79. Her passing hit and hurt Chargin harder than any fighter ever could have.

"There wasn't a day that he didn't grieve," Caplan said.

Chargin got a chance to celebrate last June when Lorraine was inducted to the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York. She and Eaton are the only two women in the Hall. Lorraine's induction was a little late. Don was inducted 10 years earlier, in 2001. In his acceptance speech, he talked about Lorraine and about how he would not be in the Hall without her. They should have gone in together, he said.

As they were in life.

And now in death.

Chargin's last 10 years without Lorraine was a decade that included long swims in a pool and further work at promoting and matchmaking. There were cards in Tucson, several in northern California and work with Gomez and Canelo. But Lorraine was never far away.

His home in Cambria was full of memorabilia, Caplan said.

"Like a boxing museum," said Caplan, who, with longtime Chargin friend Paco Damian, put together a touching memorial for the matchmaking legend on October 28 in Cambria. "But what dominated the house is a picture of Lorraine."

His death came quickly. He was gone within a few weeks after he was diagnosed with a cancer that had traveled to his brain within two weeks of Canelo's victory over GGG. In an interview with The Ring two days before the rematch, Chargin predicted Canelo would win. In his voice then, there was no regret, no trepidation.

In subsequent visits during the next 10 days, Trampler, Little War, would marvel at the Original War. Trampler says Chargin remembered everything about all those bouts, every Thursday, for 20 years at the Olympic.

"He even remembered the number," Trampler said.

It was the phone number for tickets. It appeared on banners and walls at the Olympic and in regional telecasts of the cards.

"RI9-5171," Trampler said as he looked down at his cell phone, almost as if he wanted to dial the number.

Maybe just to hear Don and Lorraine say hello.

A LITTLE SUGAR AND TWO LUMPS OF GOLD

30 YEARS AGO, SUGAR RAY LEONARD FACED OFF AGAINST THE SIGNIFICANTLY LARGER DONNY LALONDE AND WON TWO WORLD TITLES AT TWO WEIGHTS IN ONE FIGHT, ADDING A FINAL NIGHT OF GREATNESS TO HIS LEGENDARY CAREER

By **Tom Gray**

There was no way for the stricken fighter to see the punches coming. These were rapid-fire blows, felt but not seen. Flashes of multicolored Las Vegas neon and the roar of a 15,000-strong outdoor crowd at Caesars Palace accompanied the ordeal, and it was all about survival.

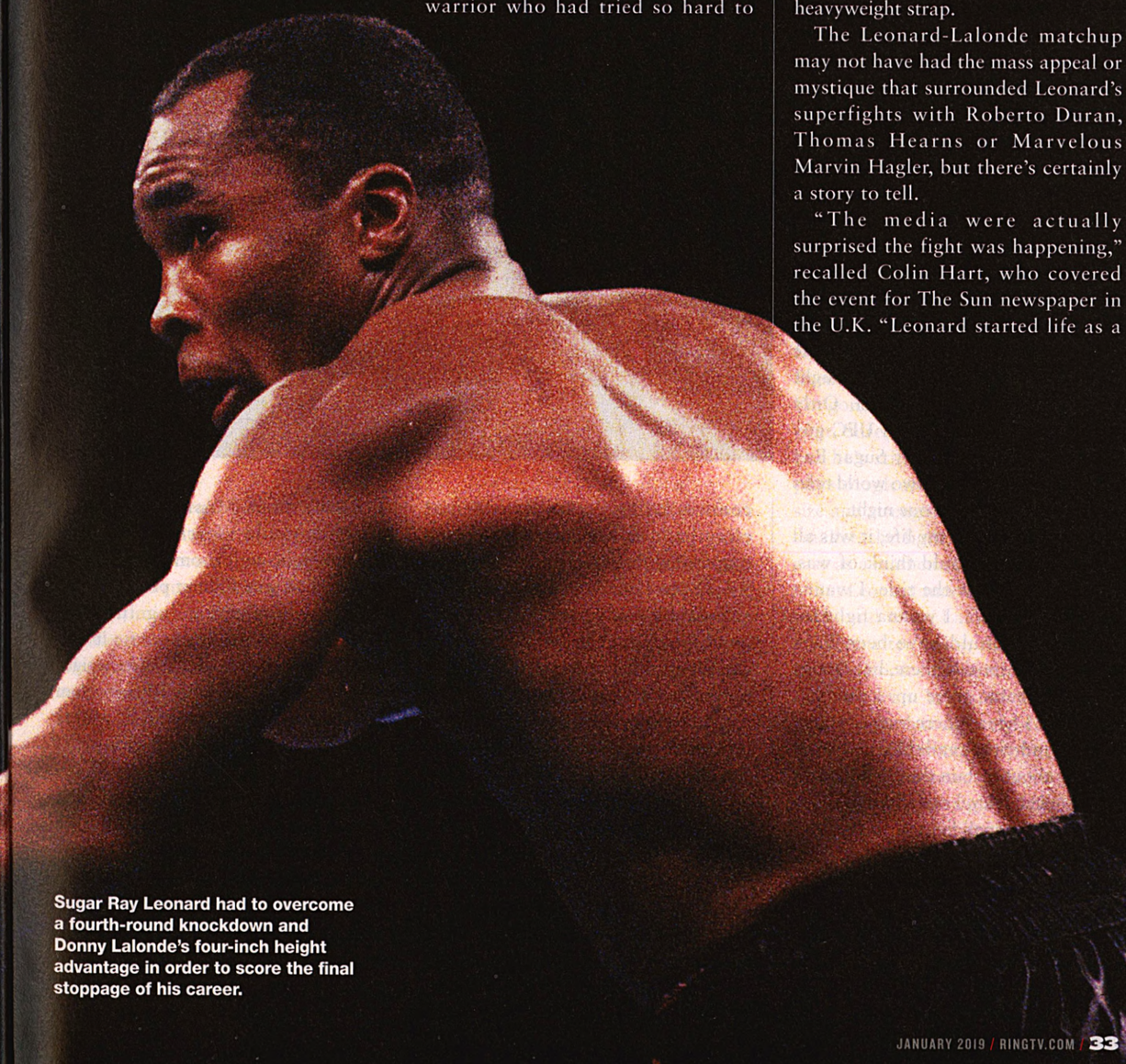
Determined to weather the storm, the fighter, who entered the ring as WBC light heavyweight titleholder, found refuge in an untidy clinch and, for the briefest of moments, he was safe. However, from nowhere, a thunderbolt left hook landed with stunning force and a blood-splattered canvas came up to meet the game warrior who had tried so hard to remain upright.

Badly hurt and bleeding, Donny Lalonde put everything he had into finding his feet. The champion's legs were shaky, his head was spinning, but the desire to win the biggest fight of his life remained unshakeable. His nemesis, however, was the great Sugar Ray Leonard, and a hurt fighter within Leonard's kill zone had very little chance of survival.

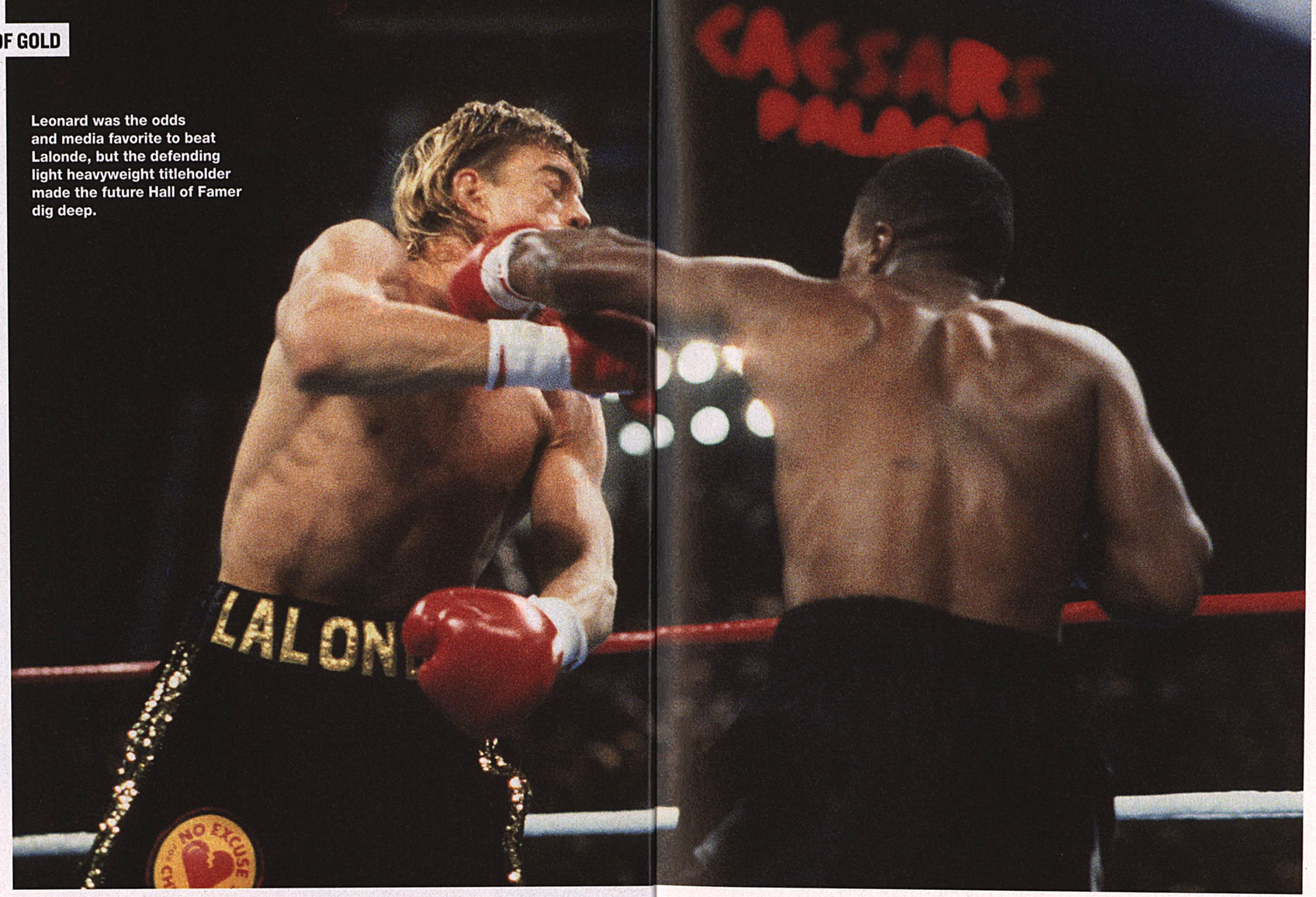
It was November 7, 1988, and the legendary three-weight world champion was looking to annex two more titles for the price of one. Yes, such was the influence of Leonard's multimillion-dollar stardust that he had convinced the WBC to put their inaugural super middleweight title on the line alongside the light heavyweight strap.

The Leonard-Lalonde matchup may not have had the mass appeal or mystique that surrounded Leonard's superfights with Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns or Marvelous Marvin Hagler, but there's certainly a story to tell.

"The media were actually surprised the fight was happening," recalled Colin Hart, who covered the event for The Sun newspaper in the U.K. "Leonard started life as a



Sugar Ray Leonard had to overcome a fourth-round knockdown and Donny Lalonde's four-inch height advantage in order to score the final stoppage of his career.



Leonard was the odds and media favorite to beat Lalonde, but the defending light heavyweight titleholder made the future Hall of Famer dig deep.

welterweight. We didn't think he was big enough for middleweight, and here he was going in against a bloody light heavyweight.

"Don't get me wrong, Lalonde wasn't a great light heavyweight, and the feeling was that Leonard would win anyway. Let's be honest, Leonard wouldn't have moved up to fight Bob Foster. Also, the fight was at 168 pounds, and that was typical Leonard. He knew it would be easier to beat Lalonde at that weight than at 175."

Despite being 32 years old, extremely inactive and way past his welterweight best, Sugar Ray Leonard was a global superstar. Fully established as one of the greatest fighters of all time following a stunning triumph over Marvelous Marvin Hagler in April 1987, Leonard had settled happily back into retirement.

But "The Sugar Man" had the world at his feet and he could write his own checks ... and his own script. The temptation for yet another comeback proved too great.

"I was in the Ali position, or the Floyd Mayweather position," chuckled Leonard in acknowledgement of his unparalleled A-side status during the 1980s. "Only Ali could have fought a wrestler (Antonio Inoki). Only Mayweather could fight a UFC guy (Conor McGregor). Only Sugar Ray Leonard could fight for two world titles at different weights in one night.

"At that point in my life, it was all very deep. All I could think of was, 'I wanna fight for the title. I wanna fight for the title. I wanna fight for the title.' I would have been back against whoever was there, but Donny Lalonde's name came up. I was at a fight and I heard there was a vacant 168-pound title available, and I get excited about certain things. (laughs) I just thought, 'Hey, I can add that to my resume. I'm gonna fight!'"

Lalonde, known as "The Golden Boy," won his world title by obliterating the more-than-capable Eddie Davis in two rounds in November 1987. Hailing from Winnipeg, Canada, he was his country's first light heavyweight champion since Jack Delaney outpointed Paul Berlenbach in 1926. An ex-ice hockey player who had also dabbled in acting, Lalonde was good-looking, charismatic and very confident in his chances of knocking out the much smaller Leonard.

Over the years, it has become popular to suggest that the 168-pound limit ruined Lalonde's chances of victory. However, the former champion denies this, and there is ample proof to back him up. Two years prior to the Leonard fight, Lalonde weighed 167 pounds for his ninth-round stoppage of Benito Fernandez and, just six months later, he weighed 171 pounds for a 12-round decision over Mustafa Hamsho. Lalonde could clearly make light heavyweight with room to spare, but preparation was still not problem-free.

"I was drained going into the Leonard fight, but not because it was at 168," revealed Lalonde. "The weight was easy for me to make. The problem was (trainer) Tommy (Gallagher) didn't believe that my body could get to 168 comfortably. He was also very concerned because Ray and I had a verbal agreement – and I would have honored it – which said my purse would be deducted a million dollars for every pound I was over 168. That was $100,000 a pound to Tommy, because he was on 10 percent.

"At the back of my mind, I don't think Tommy really felt we could win the fight, because he was probably in awe of Ray Leonard. In camp, he had me spar 10 rounds almost every day. I think, minimum, we sparred 300 rounds. After three weeks of an eight-week camp, I said to Tommy, 'Please stop worrying about the weight; I'm 167 pounds today. To make 168, all I have to do is make 172, dry out for a couple of days, hit the scales at 168, then rehydrate to 175.' But we over-trained so much that I was 163 the day of the weigh-in. If you look at the photos, I wore clothes on the scales and my pockets were full."

And so were Leonard's. He laughed when reminded that he weighed in officially at 165 pounds to Lalonde's 167. The challenger's pockets were loaded with silver dollars, and today Leonard insists that his weight was barely 160 pounds. When the bell rang for Round 1, there was no fooling anyone.

"The first punch he hit me with was a jab, and I was like, 'What the hell was that?'" recalled Leonard, his voice rising. "The power difference was just unbelievable. I'm talking to myself early on, saying, 'What the hell have I got myself into?' In the early rounds, the plan was to stay away from him, and it took me a long time to settle.

"Later on, I started landing the jab, and if you look back on the fight, you'll see that my jab was very productive. I started knocking his head back with the jab, and that encouraged me to become the aggressor. But I didn't really find my sharpness until the midway point. My natural ability and instincts came to the surface and I started breaking him down."

But before Leonard could come on strong, there was adversity to overcome. Midway through the fourth, Lalonde followed a left jab with a big right cross that struck the challenger on top of the head, sending him to the canvas. It was only the second time in his career that Leonard had suffered a knockdown, the first coming against Kevin Howard in May 1984. He acknowledged being hurt "several times" by Lalonde, but said he was "not hurt whatsoever" by that particular punch.

"Ray can say he wasn't hurt, but he went down, and Ray Leonard does not just go down," argued Lalonde sternly. "He went down because his equilibrium was knocked off, but his mind remained clear. Hurt or not, if that equilibrium shot gets you down, all I want is for the referee to count to 10, or say you're unable to continue.

"The game plan was to make Ray fight every second of every round. Eventually he would make a mistake, I'm gonna catch him and it's gonna be over. Sure, he's the great Sugar Ray, but he's still a 147-pound guy and, physiologically, if a puncher of my size and strength hits a guy that much smaller, the fight is over. It was that easy as a mathematical equation."

But Leonard survived, came storming back, and when Lalonde got back to his feet after being floored by that big left hook in Round 9, the word farthest from his mind was "easy." Referee Richard Steele completed the mandatory eight-count, and a rampaging Leonard went in for the finish. A vicious right cross landed flush, then the challenger loaded up with his signature bolo punch – a whirling right uppercut – that missed by a fraction of an inch.

"I remember watching Ray doing his little bolo thing in videos leading up to the fight," laughed Lalonde. "I

remember thinking to myself, 'No matter what happens, he's not hitting me with one of those friggin' bolo punches.' During the final barrage, he throws one and it just falls short. I was so happy, (laughs) and was clear-headed enough to make him miss that one. But the last two punches (a right hand-left hook combination) hit me in the throat and crushed my larynx. I would never hold anything against Ray for that, because all's fair in love and war.'

"After the fight, I kept saying to (manager) Dave (Wolf), 'My throat is really sore.' He would just say it's bruised and I'm like, 'Yeah, that's what it'll be.' A couple of months later, I was sparring with a heavyweight named Joey Winter and he caught me partially in the throat, and it just didn't feel right. I got an MRI and the doctor said, 'We need to do surgery immediately. I don't even know how you're breathing!' I had the surgery and I only have half a larynx now. My voice completely changed."

"Pretty boy that he was inside that ring, Leonard was a ruthless bugger, as all great champions are," recalled Hart, who watched the action unfold from ringside. "He was every bit as ruthless as Duran, Hearns or Hagler. Leonard didn't take any prisoners.

"Fighting the much bigger man, there was always the possibility that Leonard would have a few problems, but, deep down, it still felt inevitable that he would win. It was a typical Leonard knockout that was almost as nasty as when he knocked out Dave 'Boy' Green."

As had been the case on so many occasions, Leonard had turned in a show-stealing performance when the lights were brightest and the danger was highest. It was the final time he would do so. The infamous draw with Hearns followed in their June 1989 rematch, and Leonard closed out the decade with a ho-hum victory over Roberto Duran in their rubber match. Losses to Terry Norris and Hector Camacho in the 1990s convinced the great former champion that his Hall of Fame career was over.

Leonard is perhaps best remembered for his speed, power and grace, but that does him a disservice. "Balls, heart, chin, guts, mental fortitude, intestinal fortitude; all the elements you can't see" are the hallmarks which made him special, according to Lalonde. Those are the same qualities that Leonard exhibited against Wilfred Benitez, Duran, Hearns and Hagler. Lots of fighters have speed, power and grace, but very few reach all-time-great status.

"Without question, it's about heart and balls," agreed Leonard. "When you're called upon to be the best and you respond, that's what makes a champion. I try to explain it and articulate it, but unless you feel it and understand what I'm saying, you won't grasp what it really takes. It takes a lot to be able to respond that way, and it takes years of training.

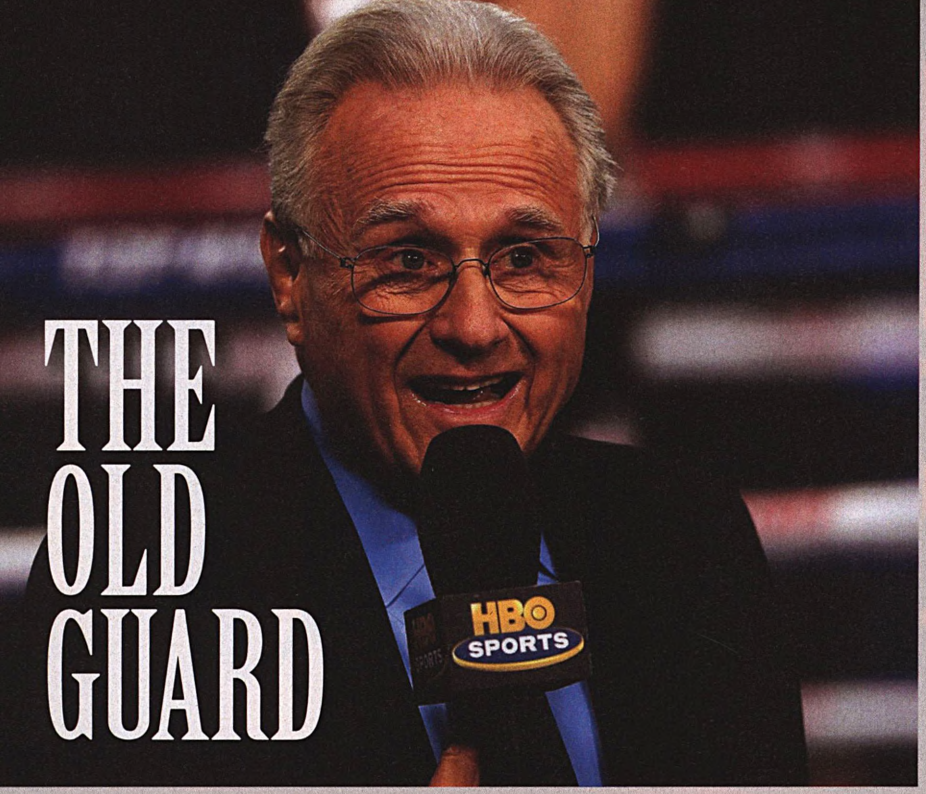
"Against Lalonde, I relied on my past experiences. Physically, everything was gone. I was fatigued, exhausted and hurt, but I had more heart, and that's what made the difference. I had him and I knew it. There's just a killer instinct that comes over me. The adrenaline kicks in, just like in my first fight with Tommy Hearns. I was completely fatigued but, all of a sudden, I get this burst of energy and I let my hands go. I just knew how to close the show."

Indeed he did.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for The Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

LEONARD-LALONDE FACT FILE

- The victory saw Leonard equal the record for world titles captured in the most divisions (five). Three days earlier, Thomas Hearns had achieved that feat by scoring a 12-round majority decision over James Kinchen. This record was later broken by Oscar De La Hoya (six) and Manny Pacquiao (eight).
- The fight was still up for grabs at the time of the stoppage. Leonard was ahead 77-74 and 77-75 on the cards of Chuck Giampa and Franz Marti, respectively. Lalonde was ahead 76-75 on the card of Stuart Kirshenbaum.
- Leonard would score the final knockdown and knockout of his professional career in this bout. He went 1-2-1 in his remaining four contests.
- Lalonde would be inactive for almost three years following this fight. He had one more title fight, a 12-round unanimous decision loss to WBA cruiserweight titleholder Bobby Czyz in May 1992.
- Leonard earned approximately $15 million from the bout ($32 million in 2018). Lalonde made approximately $5 million.



THE OLD GUARD

LARRY MERCHANT REFLECTS ON HIS FOUR DECADES OF COVERING BOXING WITH HBO

By **Steve Kim**

They say that all good things must come to an end, and after a storied run that began in 1973, HBO Sports made the decision to end its association with live boxing.

From the very beginning until 2012, Larry Merchant was a staple of the network's broadcast team. These are his comments on HBO's departure.

THE RING: What were your initial thoughts when the news hit you that HBO Sports, after 45 years, was no longer televising boxing?

LARRY MERCHANT: Well, although most of us in the fight game could see something like this coming over the last number of years as HBO's budget continued to decline, and in getting fights and marketing them, it was a bit of a Canelo body punch. I did feel it in a personal way. But when I thought about it and I thought about the arc of HBO's career in boxing, and how it went from being a good prospect to a contender and champion and so on, all I can say is, 'So long, Champ.'

As for boxing, it's got more platforms than ever, digitally and with Fox coming into the game in a big way. So it goes.

THE RING: What are some of your personal favorite moments while working the beat for HBO Sports?

LM: Well, I loved doing every fight, trying to find the stories and the narratives and hopefully putting on a good show that justified what the fighters themselves were putting themselves through. There were moving moments.

I guess my personal favorite moment – may not be others' – was after the huge, bigger than huge, upset of Mike Tyson by Buster Douglas.

Douglas' mom had died a few weeks before. He had always had a stressful relationship with his father, who had been a solid middleweight back in his youth, but (Buster) never loved boxing. But he found that's what he did best, and he did more than his best on that night. (He was very emotional), and when I went to interview him, he couldn't pull himself together. And I remember thinking in my head, 'This is show-and-tell, and all we have to do is show Buster Douglas' emotions playing themselves out right in front of us.'

I don't know how long it was, but an eternity in television time – 20 or 25 seconds – and he finally pulled himself together and he wanted to tell a story. And to me, the fact that I just let it play out and eventually got the interview, that was something that I remember: 'Let the story tell itself.'

THE RING: What's the best pure fight that you called for HBO?

LM: Well, everybody remembers the eight minutes of (Thomas) Hearns and (Marvin) Hagler for the middleweight championship. You could hardly breathe through those rounds, and whenever I'm asked that question, that's the one that comes to mind.

There are so many terrific fights. But given the stakes, given the stature of the two fighters, I don't think anything comes quite up to the fury of that eight minutes.

THE RING: You might be biased in your view, but I'm going to ask this question anyway: Do you believe that the HBO presentation of boxing was second to none?

LM: You know, I'm not good at lists or comparisons, but I know HBO had the time that previously networks never had. They're supported by advertisers. We always had the corners mic'd. We were always able to have enough time before and after the fight to present the narrative of the big picture of the fights and the personalities.

So yeah, we did it as well as it could be done at the time, and I think we created – just as the network did – in breaking new ground with edgy material, stuff you couldn't see on the regular networks in some form and order and fashion. We did that kind of thing with boxing.

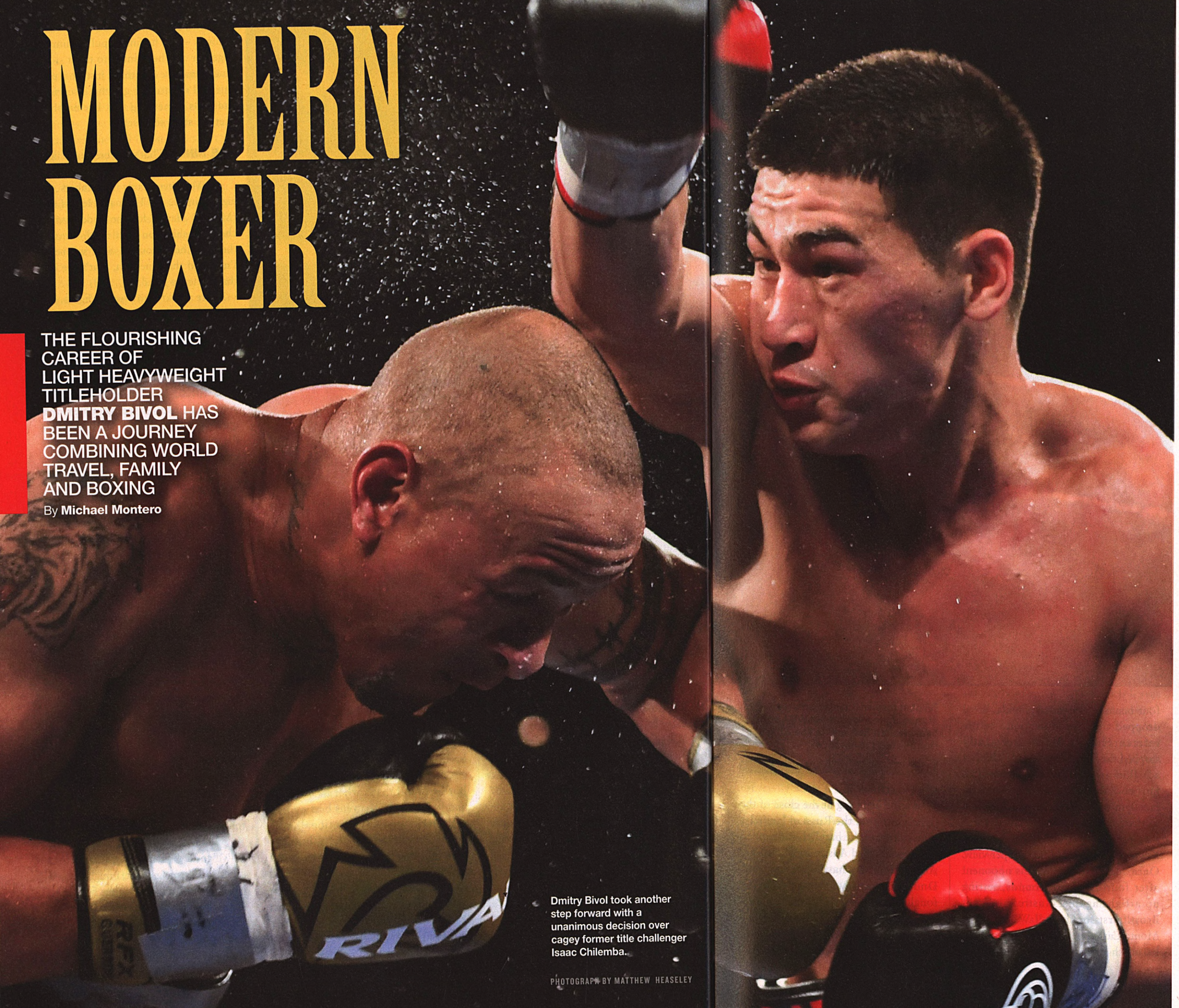
THE RING: All these streaming platforms that you mention and the other ways to watch boxing in 2018, do you watch all of it? Do you keep in touch with it as you once did?

LM: I still keep in touch with boxing. If I've got a dinner or a movie or some other social engagement, I might record it, but I watch all the big-time fights. I'm not quite into the streaming side of it; sometimes I catch up to them later, but I'm aware of what's going on and I'm a fan. And that never ends.

MODERN BOXER

THE FLOURISHING CAREER OF LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER **DMITRY BIVOL** HAS BEEN A JOURNEY COMBINING WORLD TRAVEL, FAMILY AND BOXING

By **Michael Montero**



Dmitry Bivol took another step forward with a unanimous decision over cagey former title challenger Isaac Chilemba.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW HEASELEY

It's a 14-hour flight from Saint Petersburg, Russia, to Los Angeles, one that Dmitry Yuryevich Bivol makes several times a year to train in Southern California. But the WBA light heavyweight titleholder has never been a stranger to traveling. Born in the former Soviet Republic of Kyrgyzstan to a Moldovan father and a Korean mother, Bivol took up boxing at age 6. Kyrgyzstan, which sits just north of China and south of Kazakhstan (the birthplace of a certain middleweight you may have heard of), was home to the Bivol family until they relocated to Russia when Dmitry was 11. "My parents did not have a good job in Kyrgyzstan; life was tough," Bivol told The Ring. "They decided to move us to Russia because there were more opportunities for me and my two sisters."

Although he missed his friends back home, Dmitry quickly assimilated to life in Russia. He found his new classmates very accepting and never felt different due to his mixed ancestry. "I always spoke Russian because Kyrgyzstan was part of the former Soviet Union. When we moved to Russia I didn't feel like a foreigner, because the culture was the same, the school system was similar," said Bivol. "The Russian Federation is a nation of many nationalities. I never felt left out because my mother was Asian; there are many Asians in Russia."

Dmitry, or Dima for short, took English classes at school when he was young. These days in Russia, he works with an English tutor who is originally from Scotland. But he also credits American television for his understanding of the language. "My wife and I watch *Modern Family* and *Desperate Housewives* – she chooses the things we watch," laughs Bivol. "Every evening, we watch movies in English."

Ekaterina, or Katya for short, speaks fluent English and serves as a tutor for her husband as well. "I went to an English school in Saint Petersburg when I was young," she said. "I

even traveled to London with my schoolmates for summer school and studied there."

Like Dmitry, Katya comes from a diverse background. She grew up in Sochi, site of the 2014 Winter Olympics, born to a Russian mother and an ethnic Kazakh father. She explains the story of how she and Dmitry met 11 years ago. "I was traveling with my mother to Sochi to visit my grandmother, who was ill," said Katya. "Dmitry was on the same flight with the (Russian national boxing) team. We met at the airport and exchanged numbers. Two weeks later, he asked my mother for permission to go on a date and she agreed, so the two of us went for a walk. That was the beginning to our love story."

It was also around the beginning of what would become a stellar amateur career for Bivol, who compiled a record of 268-15 that included several Russian national championships. As the 2012 London Olympic qualifiers approached, Bivol wasn't quite at the top of his division on the Russian national team. Eventual light heavyweight representative Egor Mekhontsev (currently 13-0-1 as a pro) would go on to claim the only gold medal for Russian boxing in the London Games. Dmitry became the top man on the team soon afterward, but he decided to turn professional rather than wait for the 2016 Rio Olympics. "To participate in the Olympics is the main goal in amateur boxing, but I decided to go pro and I am happy that I did," said Bivol. "I don't have any regrets."

Bivol went pro in November 2014 and scored six consecutive stoppages before encountering a significant challenge in his seventh bout. "My fight for the WBA interim belt in Moscow was tough," Bivol said. "It was the first time I went all 12 rounds. My opponent (Felix Valera of the Dominican Republic) was very tough." His American network debut came on April 14, 2017, in the headlining bout of a ShoBox card against Dallas southpaw Samuel Clarkson. Over four brutally one-sided rounds, Bivol dropped Clarkson three times before referee Harvey Dock mercifully stopped the fight in the fourth. This left a hell of an impression on American fans and network executives alike. In fact, Dmitry's very next fight – against Cedric Agnew two months later – was part of the Andre Ward-Sergey Kovalev 2 card on HBO pay-per-view. Once again, he stopped his opponent after four dominant rounds, setting up a fight against Australian Trent Broadhurst for the full WBA title in Monte Carlo later that fall. It wouldn't be much of a fight. Just a moment before the bell rang at the close of the opening round, the Russian landed a devastating right hand that dropped the overmatched Aussie for the count. Although it may have appeared easy, Dmitry says it was not. "When I fought Broadhurst, HBO came all the way to Monaco for me," said Bivol. "I was quite nervous; I felt pressure to perform. Every fight is difficult in its own way."

Bivol, a former Russian amateur standout, now wears the WBA light heavyweight belt and is The Ring's No. 2-rated 175-pounder.

It certainly is true that every fight is difficult, including the months of preparation beforehand. Oftentimes, training camp is a lonely affair, especially when it's thousands of miles away from loved ones. "I have been training in Los Angeles since 2014, first at Wild Card and most recently at Legendz Gym. It's hard being away from family for more than half of the year," Bivol said. "The time difference makes it difficult to connect, but we find time. I call Katya and my boys (Miron, 3½ years old, and Nikon, almost 2) on FaceTime, WhatsApp and Skype." This year, Dmitry began bringing his family over toward the end of fight camp to make things more comfortable. Things would become more challenging in the ring, however, as he would take on his toughest opponents to date.

First up was Cuban veteran Sullivan Barrera (who had lost only once by decision to Andre Ward coming in) at Madison Square Garden on March 3. It was a competitive, albeit one-sided, learning lesson for Bivol, who was ahead 109-100 on all three judges' scorecards before dropping and stopping Barrera in the final round. On August 4 in Atlantic City, South African spoiler Isaac Chilemba would take Bivol the 12-round distance for only the second time in his career. "Barrera is a really good fighter and Chilemba is a really difficult opponent," said Bivol. "He is very awkward." Former champion and fellow Russian Sergey Kovalev, who had picked up the WBO title in his comeback fight after losing to Ward twice, headlined both cards. The plan at HBO was to match Kovalev and Bivol in a unification bout next, should they both successfully defend their titles in Atlantic City. That all came crashing down when Colombian-Canadian Eleider Alvarez crushed "Krusher" with a massive right hand and stopped him in the seventh round of their bout. Now it appears that Alvarez and Kovalev will likely fight an immediate rematch on ESPN in early 2019, which leaves Bivol contemplating his next move.

"I really wanted to fight Kovalev, but of course I want Alvarez now because he has a belt," said Bivol. "I thought Kovalev was winning the fight (against Alvarez) until he got caught with the big punch. Before, I favored him 90 percent over Alvarez, but now for the rematch I think it's 50/50. Either way, I want the winner. I would even go to Montreal to face Alvarez (where he is based)."

Bivol makes it clear his mission is to unify all the belts, although there are network conflicts with other beltholders. Longtime WBC titleholder Adonis Stevenson is scheduled to face Ukrainian Oleksandr Gvozdyk December 1 on Showtime. "I favor Gvozdyk because he has better stamina," Bivol said. "During Stevenson's last fight against Badou Jack, he became tired too quickly. But I don't care who the winner is. I want to face the best guys."

For now, Bivol will have to turn back the challenge of former champion Jean Pascal on November 24. That bout will be televised on HBO, which recently announced that it would discontinue its live boxing programming at the close of 2018.

No matter who he faces in the future, one thing is certain: Ekaterina won't be able to watch. "For the last 10 years I have never watched Dima's fights," she said. "Oh my god, I feel so stressed, even weeks before the fight. I can watch the ring walks on TV, but then I turn it off. During the fights, I text my friends on the phone and they tell me how Dima is doing. It's just too hard for me to watch." And what if young Miron and Nikon decide to take up boxing one day? "Not professional!" shouts Katya, with Dmitry chuckling beside her. "Of course we would let them go to the boxing gym; I would be happy if they like boxing," he adds. "But we would only want them to train, not to fight. It's such a tough sport. We would be too nervous for their health."

The Bivols want to explore America more with their two boys. Although they have traveled to Los Angeles for Dmitry's recent camps, the family has returned to Saint Petersburg immediately after the fights. "It's been nice to come to America for the camp; that is OK for now," said Ekaterina. "But in the future we would like to stay after the fight to enjoy America and see the country more."

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast, The Neutral Corner, can be heard on iTunes, Stitcher and SoundCloud.

ROCKING THE CRADLE

NEW YORK GOLDEN GLOVES LEGEND **NISA RODRIGUEZ** DREAMS OF OLYMPIC GLORY FOR FAMILY AND COUNTRY

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Nisa Rodriguez could have turned pro years ago, but she has remained an amateur for the opportunity to represent Puerto Rico at the 2020 Olympic Games.

As an aspiring Olympian with eight New York Golden Gloves titles and a starring role in the recently released documentary *Cradle of Champions*, it's funny to hear Nisa Rodriguez say, "I always thought my life was pretty boring."

It's not. But even if in some bizarro universe it was, business is about to pick up as the Bronx native continues her quest to represent Puerto Rico in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. As The Ring caught up to Rodriguez, she was packing for a trip to September's *Boxam* tournament in Castellon, Spain. She lost a decision to Team USA's Naomi Graham, but the middleweight isn't slowing down as 2018 comes to a close.

In November, it's the AIBA Women's World Championships in India, then Olympic qualifiers in 2019. It's a whirlwind for Rodriguez, who is starting to get the same level of acclaim around the country and the world that she's received in the New York area since she won her first pair of Golden Gloves at 17. A lot of that has to do with people seeing her story through *Cradle of Champions*, which premiered on Showtime in September.

"I think it's about time people who aren't competing see what we go through," said Rodriguez, one of three boxers featured in the film. "In the amateurs, people base their life around this one tournament in the hope that they get their name out there. It's a lot of training – running in the winter, sparring when you don't want to go to the gym and just want to stay home. ... You have to work, and on top of that find the energy to go to the gym. And I have a child, so me being a single parent, it's hard. People don't realize how much work you have to do and how long it takes for these three rounds. People train all year round just to win a pair of gloves."

Now she wants to trade those gold gloves for a gold medal. It wasn't a route the 27-year-old expected to take, especially after breaks taken to give birth to her son, Emerson,

It's been a sacrifice on mulitple levels, but Rodriguez has a nation's support and a future plan to keep her motivated.

and to deal with the aftermath of an eye injury that required surgery and threatened her career.

"A couple years ago, I was supposed to go pro and ended up having eye surgery, which set me back a whole year and I couldn't do anything," Rodriguez recalls. "And when I started getting back into it, Puerto Rico asked me to represent them for the next Olympic trials and I said I'm gonna go for the Olympic Games. Anyone could go pro, but how many people can say that they're an Olympian? That's rare."

It's even rarer for a fighter to forego the lure of money and titles in the pro game to represent her people in the Olympics. But Rodriguez had more reasons to stay in the amateur ranks than to leave, and the most important one may be a promise to her father, Eduardo.

"My father passed away in September (2017), and when they asked me to represent Puerto Rico for the trials, he was sitting next to me," she said. "So I feel like a part of me owes it to him as well. He was very proud to hear that I was representing our island, and it's a big thing. Puerto Rican pride is a big thing, whether you're living on the island or living in the Bronx. I just came back from the Central American Games in August and I won a gold medal. My name was on billboards, they were waiting for me in the airport, and it's big for us. You either play baseball or you box – and you gotta pick one."

Rodriguez picked boxing, or, more accurately, she was drafted into it at 13 by her father after she was getting into the usual trouble kids tend to find at that age. She was a natural, and four years later she began etching her name in the record books. But while she owes her in-the-ring life to her father, she is quick to praise her mother, Sandra, outside the ring.

"She had four kids, and seeing her strive, you appreciate that dedication," Rodriguez said. "I appreciate that dedication my mother gave me, and I always said my mother is my queen, because she worked hard. We didn't have everything we wanted, but we always had everything we needed. She did that for us, and we all went to Catholic school. She worked two or three jobs and she did it for us. So I feel like I have to raise that bar for my son, because when he gets a little older and goes to school and he has children of his own, you always want your kids to do better than what you did and what you accomplished. So I'm raising the stakes for my son."

Not surprisingly, Emerson, now 9 years old, got hooked on the sweet science after spending a good chunk of his childhood going to gyms with his mom. That was a hard pill for Rodriguez to swallow initially, but now she's warming to the idea of her son being in the ring ... in limited doses.

"I told myself for years that he's not fighting," Rodriguez said. "Then he asked me to do it, and I saw that he could take a hit. But it hurt me. I think it hurt me more than it hurt him, seeing him get hit in the face. (laughs) But he was training hard for it and he caught the bug. I wouldn't want him to go pro, but boxing has allowed me to travel the world, and I don't want to deprive him of that."

He may go even deeper down the boxing rabbit hole should his mom get to Tokyo, because in addition to the festival-like atmosphere of the Olympics, there's the aforementioned reality that few fans get behind their fighters quite like Puerto Ricans do. Win or lose, there's a connection between natives of the island and those who represent them in the ring.

"I think Hispanic people in general are passionate," she said. "But I can't explain the pride [Puerto Ricans] have. It's a tiny island; you can go through the whole island in one day. And having someone come from that small island with that fighting spirit is something they just love to embrace. It's that passion."

Not that the love comes without sacrifice. For one thing, it involves surviving the often brutal Caribbean heat.

"Imagine us training," Rodriguez laughs. "We're in Salinas in the mountains. And we have to wear long sleeves, and you're basically dying from that so you don't die from the sun."

But Rodriguez is a fighter, so she's not complaining. Currently competing at 165 pounds, 13 above her optimal weight, because it's her best chance to qualify among the five divisions in women's Olympic boxing competition (flyweight, featherweight, lightweight, welterweight and middleweight), the New Yorker isn't bothered by the switch in divisions.

"I just want to make the Olympic team," she said. "I'll fight in either."

And even though the New York Golden Gloves were missing from the schedule in 2018, should they return in 2019 ... "Of course I'll go," she says with a chuckle.

Of course she will, because Rodriguez isn't just fighting for herself. She's fighting for her son, her family, her island and the kids in the Bronx who look up to her.

"I have my eyes on the gold medal," she said. "And beyond that, I'm trying to live the American Dream right now. You come from nothing, you're trying to hustle in New York, you try to make it here, especially with a child, and you're doing something that a lot of people don't have a chance to overcome as far as being a female in this male-dominated sport.

"My hope is to go pro after the Olympics, get a couple world titles, open up a gym and a foundation, and I want to give back. I wish when I started I had someone doing that for me and trying to mentor me, because I feel I would have been in a so much better place in boxing than where I'm at. So I have to pave the way for the next generation." RING

MAYHEM IN LAS VEGAS

THE RING'S REVIEW OF THE LATEST ACTION IN MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

By **Gareth A Davies**

Scenes of utter mayhem fell on the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas as UFC 229, which turned out to be the biggest-selling mixed martial arts event in history, ended in a mass brawl between the teams of its two headline contenders – Conor McGregor, of Ireland, and Khabib Nurmagomedov. The Russian retained his Ultimate Fighting Championship lightweight crown (155 pounds in MMA) by submitting his rival in the fourth round.

Yet the rear naked choke finish soon turned Sin City dark, as Nurmagomedov spat venom at his fallen foe, bounced his gum shield off the canvas and climbed over the cage to hurl himself, feet first like an eagle, at the rival team. He made a beeline for Dillon Danis, one of McGregor's cornermen.

Fight sports entertainment, in an instant, turned into gang violence in the street. That's how fine the line can be. It was ugly, it was disturbing, but the warning signs had been there in the buildup.

The wild scenes of anger and hatred that erupted appeared to be a continuation of the bad blood after McGregor infamously attacked a bus carrying Nurmagomedov in Brooklyn, New York, in April. The metal dolly McGregor hit the bus with smashed the windows, injuring other fighters. The Irishman had taunted the Russian ever since.

Months of hostility and threats about "settling it in the street" between the fighters' camps boiled over in Vegas as McGregor exchanged blows with the champion's cornerman before two other team members went for McGregor himself. One of them attacked from behind, landing blows

Khabib Nurmagomedov submitted Conor McGregor in Round 4 of their grudge-match main event to the wildly successful UFC 229... and then the real drama began.

DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA

on the Irishman's head. That there was not a riot in the arena was a near-miracle. The governor of Nevada was there, and there are likely major implications for those involved. In many ways, the contest itself, and a thoroughly entertaining night of fights, became an irrelevant talking point as mixed martial arts – a visceral all-action sport with combatants using a hybrid of martial arts in effective fighting, though seen as brutal by the uninitiated – came under attack from indignant column writers everywhere. It was a black eye for MMA, as viral videos went around the world showing the mayhem, with security personnel attempting to restrict the trouble, calm both fighters and separate the camps. Three men from Nurmagomedov's entourage were arrested by police officers – and later released. McGregor had decided not to press charges.

The UFC's president, promoter Dana White, explained that they had never had as much security at an event. "Police officers were getting punched, security guys were getting punched. I actually think police and security did an incredible job. Khabib jumped over the cage like one of those Parkour guys. What are you expected to do?" said the promoter.

"What he should have done was walk over, pick Conor up and say some great things to [each other]. Whatever you think of Conor, at least respect the guy. I don't like it and don't want to ever be in that position again. It's a great sport with great athletes and this is not how we conduct ourselves."

It was a bad night for how the sport is viewed in the mainstream. No question. And on a night when the most eyes in its 25-year history were watching. Yet given the magnitude of the event and how far it reached in the comment pages, that normally means a rematch is in the cards. The double-down moment in Vegas.

Given early estimates that the pay-per-view numbers were over 2 million, the combined takings from the gate and the event would have reached around $160 million. Money talks in the fight business. And if the rematch can be made, it will bubble and boil again. After the event, Nurmagomedov's $2 million purse was withheld by the Nevada State Athletic Commission, pending an inquiry. The Russian may be fined 10 percent of his purse and potentially banned for a year. In some ways, this was reminiscent of the Mike Tyson-Evander Holyfield "Bite Fight" in 1997. Tyson was fined $3 million and was suspended indefinitely at first, but still boxed a year later. Tyson, of course, went on a rampage at Holyfield and his trainer, with similar scenes of mayhem 21 years ago. It made one smile when Tyson commented that UFC 229 "was crazier" when asked to compare the two debacles. It certainly says something deep. Worth noting, moreover, is how rematches, animosity, and the promise of violence and pandemonium will always sell. Holyfield-Tyson 2 is the fifth biggest PPV of all time (1.99 million buys) in boxing and MMA. McGregor, as the other half of Floyd Mayweather's 50th fight (4.3 million), has been involved in both the second-highest grossing boxing match of all time and the two biggest MMA money-spinners – against Nate Diaz, the second time they met (1.65 million), and now this latest melee against Nurmagomedov (approximately 2 million). Those figures alone suggest we will be watching between our fingers once more in around 12 months' time.

BELLATOR IN SAN JOSE AND NEW YORK

On the two weekends on either side of the Ultimate Fighting Championship event, Bellator MMA, fast growing through VIACOM ownership and its new streaming deal with DAZN, put on two of the biggest events in its history. Bellator 206 in San Jose pitched Gegard Mousasi, the middleweight champion, against Rory MacDonald, the welterweight champion. Both are exports from the UFC.

The main event proved to be one-sided, Mousasi dominating the outmatched MacDonald over two rounds before finishing his opponent by ground and pound. There are weight divisions for a reason, and this looked a step too far for MacDonald in his tilt at the slick Mousasi, who has a phenomenal all-around game and belongs in the top five pound-for-pound in the world. There was also a quadrilogy contest between MMA icons Rampage Jackson and Wanderlei Silva, with the American stopping the Brazilian by TKO in the second round of a fairly thrilling, fan-friendly bout. It's now 2-2, and they might just do a fifth encounter, reckons Bellator CEO Scott Coker. Earlier, in the opening tier of Bellator's eight-man Welterweight Grand Prix, the brilliant Brazilian Douglas Lima defeated Russian Andrey Koreshkov by rear naked choke in the fifth round of their bout after a dominant display of striking and low leg kicks. Rising star Aaron Pico knocked out Leandro Higo in a scintillating, aggressive assault as the Californian moved up the ladder at featherweight. In his corner were Bob Cook, Anthony McKee and one Freddie Roach. Some corner team that is. It was a fine night, with Bellator aired on DAZN for the first time in a multi-year deal worth over $100 million. Coker insisted that it was the "best put-together card" he has worked on in a 30-year career in martial arts, through Strikeforce – or anywhere else for that matter.

A week after the battle of Las Vegas, Bellator moved to the East Coast and, in a daring move, put on consecutive fight nights in Connecticut and then New York, which involved 58 fighters

Rampage Jackson (left) stopped fellow MMA icon Wanderlei Silva in Round 2 of their fourth fight, tying their series at 2-2 in the co-main event at Bellator 206.

and their teams hosting media days and press conferences around Manhattan for the headline protagonists in the Heavyweight Grand Prix semifinals, as well as shuttling staff and fighters between the two states. It was some feat. At Bellator 207 on October 12 at Mohegan Sun, Ryan Bader defeated Matt Mitrione with a brilliant display of wrestling over five rounds to progress to the finals at The Forum in Inglewood, California, on January 26.

The following day at the Nassau Coliseum in Long Island, New York, Russian MMA icon Fedor Emelianenko, the dominant heavyweight in the PRIDE era and regarded as past his prime at 42 yet still dangerous, stopped American Chael Sonnen in the first round, showing that his speed, power and strength are still formidable. Fedor dropped southpaw Sonnen with heavy strikes in the opening seconds, reversed two top positions that the American achieved by getting Emelianenko to the ground, and his Sambo skills were too much for his foe, competing in just his second heavyweight fight, having campaigned at middleweight and light heavyweight for most of his career. It was proof again that weight divisions exist for a reason. RING

FIGHT ROUNDUP

Terence Crawford literally waited until the last minute to end his grudge match with Jose Benavidez Jr.

PHOTO BY ERIC FRANCIS/GETTY IMAGES

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

TERENCE CRAWFORD
TKO 12
JOSE BENAVIDEZ JR.

Oct. 13, CHI Health Center, Omaha, Nebraska

The Canelo-Golovkin rematch in September was stoked by some bitter words, but all the talk of vindication and the integrity of boxing looked like a scholarly debate compared to the trash that was slung by Jose Benavidez Jr. and Terence Crawford. Crawford said it went back to a challenge in February, when Benavidez accused the three-division titleholder from Nebraska of feasting on easy targets. Benavidez boiled it down to "I simply don't like him."

The first punch – more of a right-hook slap – was thrown at the weigh-in by Crawford. Benavidez slipped it, which probably actually bought him a few points with some amateur oddsmakers. Still, the cocky Arizona native entered the arena as the villainous underdog, taunting the boobirds by drawing a glove across his throat in the universal gesture for decapitation. A more serene "Bud" was cheered through the sea of Cornhusker red by 13,000-plus fans, which included sweatshirt-clad billionaire Warren Buffett in the cheap seats.

After initially refusing to "touch 'em up," however, neither fighter charged forward in a headhunting rage. Crawford mocked with tongue wags and Benavidez seethed behind his hell-bent stare, but both kept their professional composure

Benavidez was tougher than expected, but Crawford systematically broke him down.

and started out cautiously, clearly wary of the danger in front of them. Early on, Crawford, who was defending his WBO welterweight title for the first time, switched to southpaw and remained there for most of the fight, gradually claiming the canvas outside Benavidez's left foot as they jousted for control. Benavidez stalked forward like he was following a scent, hands down and head forward, daring his opponent to repeat the weigh-in stunt. They wanted to fight, without a doubt, but neither wanted to risk a mistake that wouldn't so much cause them to lose as deny them the chance to inflict pain.

By the fourth and fifth rounds, Benavidez was having some success with body punches and short combos set up by a heavy jab, and his already-superior stature was inflating with confidence, but footwork-wise he fought like an action figure pegged to the scenery by holes in his flat soles (to be fair, this probably had something to do with the leg-shattering gunshot he'd remarkably overcome two years earlier). Crawford, meanwhile, used his agility to come in from all angles, his head-bobs turning into a groove as he learned Benavidez's patterns and adjusted to time the gaps, attacking more frequently and from shorter range with characteristic accuracy.

We've come to expect this from Crawford, that he will figure everybody out eventually. His fans also appreciate that Bud enjoys his work enough to indulge his mean streak a bit; it frees them to sit back and unapologetically cheer the killer whale as it tosses the seal around like a squeaky chew toy. Benavidez shook his head in denial every time Crawford landed a punch, but those shakes weren't scoring any points and they weren't fooling anyone about how the fight was going. Jose would not be joining 168-pound brother David as a titleholder on this particular night. The only victory left for him was going the distance. But even that was snatched away with less than a minute remaining in the fight when Crawford dropped Benavidez with a perfect right uppercut, then finished him on the ropes at 2:42.

Crawford (34-0, 25 KOs), who everyone hopes will find opportunities to face the best at 147 (Errol Spence, please) in the changing broadcast landscape, said afterward that he'd seen the opportunity for the uppercut early, but waited until Benavidez tired. Or maybe he just wanted to savor every minute of the experience. Regardless, the final bell seemed to do little to end the feud. There was no post-fight hug.

JORGE LINARES KO 3 ABNER COTTO

Sept. 29, Fantasy Springs Casino, Indio, California

As soon as the fight started, Jorge Linares looked like a guy who needed to vent some

frustration. For almost six years, the Venezuelan had been chopping his way back to a major fight, trying to re-demonstrate the artistry that had drawn so much pound-for-pound praise before back-to-back losses. He'd been succeeding marvelously, going on a 13-fight roll against increasingly difficult opposition, picking up a lightweight title on the way and ultimately claiming the Ring championship at 135 pounds. Then, in May, Linares found himself in the ring with a first-time lightweight named Vasiliy Lomachenko, got TKO'd, and the good times rolled to a sighing halt.

Abner Cotto, whose only resemblance to second cousin Miguel is his apparent disdain for smiling, was thrown into the situation with everything but a bell around his neck. The pre-fight scouting reports were kind, using words like "solid" and "legitimate" – and it's true; he was on a nice run and was no scrub – but there wasn't a lot of enthusiasm behind those descriptions. Mostly this was a chance for Golden Boy Promotions to put Linares under observation and see how he was coping with his recent loss.

Linares, fighting halfway between lightweight and junior welterweight, seemed impatient with the idea of being coddled. He was immediately the aggressor, clearing the way for his antsy footwork with a high-and-low jab that kept Cotto off-balance and exposed for Linares' never-boring mix of punches. But there's always that thing with Linares where you wonder how a guy so slick is getting hit by so many basic shots; it's like he gets hyper-focused on conceiving combinations and has to get tagged a few times in a row before he snaps out of his trance and remembers to activate his defense. Once he does, he's amazing, anticipating and blocking punches like a clairvoyant. And none of that is meant to denigrate Cotto, who was a solid and legitimate opponent.

Linares had surely noticed by the second round that when he jabbed Cotto, the Puerto Rican would defensively thrust his arms forward like one of those punching puppets, leaving his head surrounded by a massive sphere of empty airspace. After a few probing stabs, Linares timed a pickaxe right that struck Cotto full-force on the temple. There was a pause, during which a fighter with Linares' hand speed easily could've landed another eight punches, but the knockdown was already underway and the ex-champ let Cotto fall in peace. Cotto got up and survived the round, though.

In the third, Linares was searching for a big uppercut or something similar to finish with. He scored with a three-punch counterattack, again with a

Jorge Linares looked sharp dispatching overmatched Abner Cotto in his jump up to junior welterweight.

damaging straight right, saw his opening and pushed several steps forward with his hand cocked like a cricket bowler before releasing the punch for a second knockdown. Cotto again got up, slowly, and seemed to give referee Raul Caiz Sr. an "are you serious" look when he realized the fight was going to continue. Perhaps still pissed at Caiz, Cotto unwisely spread his arms to protest a low blow during Linares' follow-up attack. Several temple shots and a tackle later, the experiment was over.

It was a sharp performance from Linares, one sure to put him on the fast track to a title shot at 140, perhaps against WBC incumbent Jose Ramirez.

JESSIE VARGAS D 12 THOMAS DULORME

Oct. 6, Wintrust Arena, Chicago

Most times, a draw is even worse than an undeserved win, because the most deplorable way any judgment-based system can fail – more unforgivable than being corrupt – is by being indecisive. Occasionally, however, a "D" is delivered and everyone has to look at each other, shrug and admit they can't complain. Not that anyone was happy about it, but the majority draw announced after 12 rounds of fast-paced, tit-for-tat battling between Jessie Vargas and Thomas Dulorme (scores of 113-113, 113-113 and 115-111 for Vargas) was at least fair.

Dulorme threw punches wider than a golf swing, but he operated from such a distance that Vargas

Jessie Vargas (left) and Thomas Dulorme traded heavy punches for 12 hotly contested rounds during their October 6 main event in Chicago.

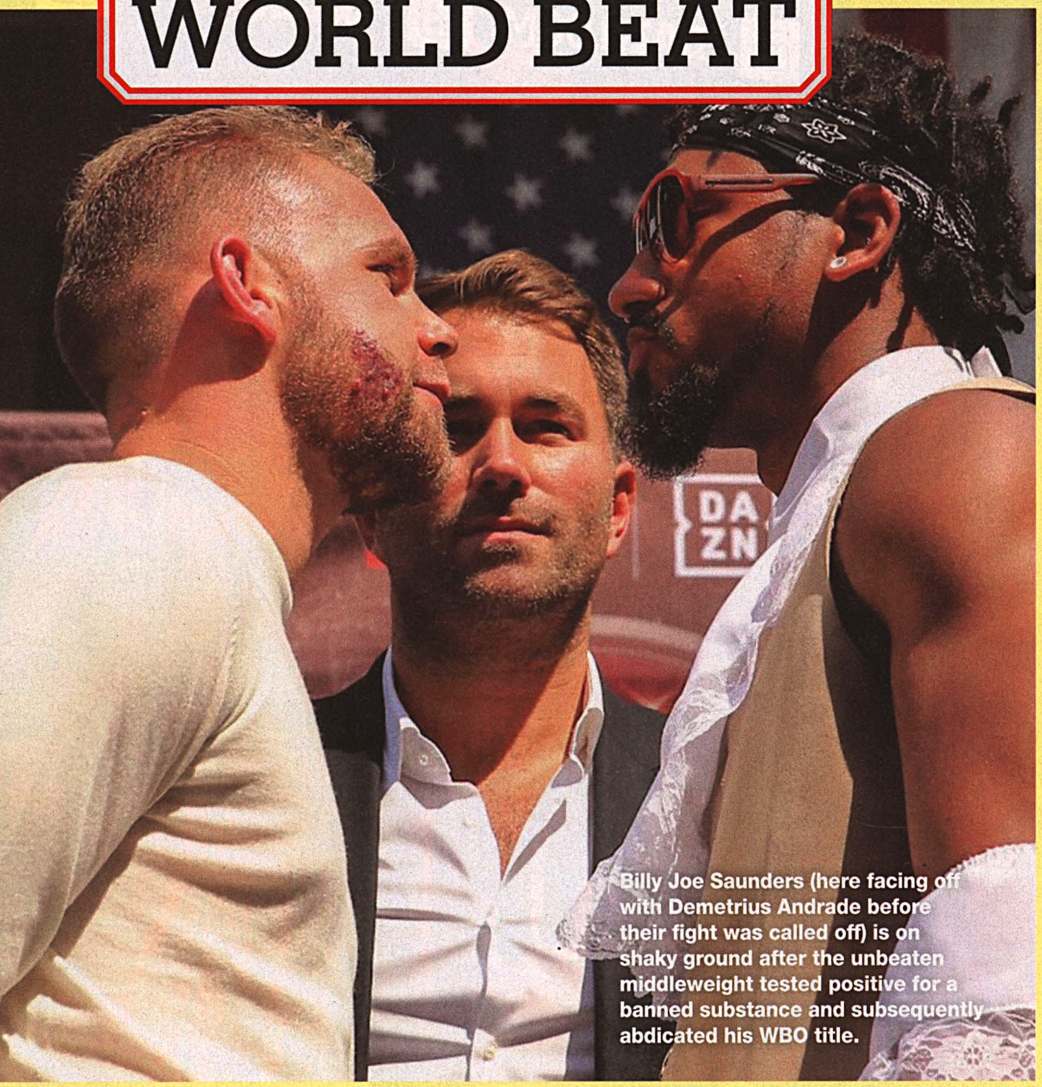
The faces don't lie: Nobody likes a draw. But the only thing Vargas and Dulorme have to regret is being so evenly matched.

had a hard time even touching him with a jab. The Puerto Rican also had the quickness to swoop in under his opponent's punches to get in position, and he nearly felled the ex-titleholder with a hook at the end of the opening round. Vargas, bleeding heavily from an eyebrow cut caused by an accidental headbutt in the second, took the momentum in Round 4 with a big straight right that put Dulorme into holding mode. The advantage swung back and forth in the fifth when Vargas landed a pair of clean, heavy blows and Dulorme retaliated with consecutive throat punches. And so it went, with little rounds within rounds that made it difficult to see who was winning the larger fight. Is it possible to say "too even"?

A moment of clarity finally happened in Round 10 when both fighters attacked simultaneously, but Vargas ducked the right headed his way and landed flush with one of his own, momentarily shorting out Dulorme's balance and dropping him to a knee. The knockdown probably sealed the win in Vargas' mind, and he couldn't help but yell in celebration – he, more than anyone, didn't want a draw after his last fight against Adrien Broner had also ended with a pair of indecisive scorecards. His overconfidence was his undoing, though. In sight of victory, Vargas' excitement supercharged his offense, and in trying to finish the fight by bullying Dulorme backward, he overextended himself and got dropped by a scooping right hand with only seconds remaining in the fight. The flash knockdown didn't hurt Vargas, and he bounced up laughing at his own carelessness, but it probably was the deciding factor on the cards.

No complaints, though. Two resilient, highly skilled welterweights went all-out for 12 action-packed rounds, and the decision could've gone either way. It was a good day to draw.

WORLD BEAT



Billy Joe Saunders (here facing off with Demetrius Andrade before their fight was called off) is on shaky ground after the unbeaten middleweight tested positive for a banned substance and subsequently abdicated his WBO title.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

SAUNDERS FALLS INTO CAREER LIMBO

Two months of very mixed fortunes for titleholders in the U.K. ... Middleweight Billy Joe Saunders will look back on the fall of 2018 either as the time he rebuilt his career, or a period in which it was scattered with the falling leaves to the four winds. Super middleweight Callum Smith, meanwhile, as seen surrounded by his father and three brothers in the emotional scenes in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, after defeating George Groves, realized his greatest athletic dream of becoming a world champion and holder of the Ring Magazine belt. No wonder the Smiths went rowdy in Saudi for the youngest of the four siblings, who have all been involved in world title challenges. It was a comprehensive victory, too, for a very nice kid, though he is already 28 years old.

For all the wrong reasons, Saunders, just a year older than Smith, was fighting a different kind of battle, and it was not even in the ring. Saunders was never allowed to defend his WBO middleweight title on a card in Boston against American Demetrius Andrade, which was poised to be a fascinating contest between two undefeated fighters – 26-0 and 25-0, respectively.

Instead, the fight with Andrade, due to take place on October 20, was canceled after Saunders returned an adverse finding in a Voluntary Anti-Doping Association test on August 30 (incidentally, his 29th birthday). A statement from his promoter, Frank Warren, said at the time that the substance – the stimulant oxilofrine – was a "common decongestant nasal spray." Under World Anti-Doping Agency and U.K. Anti-Doping rules, oxilofrine is only banned in competition, meaning a fighter is only in breach of the rules if the substance is detected in his system on the day of the bout.

That's not how the Massachusetts State Athletic Commission saw it, and the matter will now end up in court after an appeal, conducted on the phone, fell on deaf ears at the state offices. Warren is convinced that the Massachusetts commission went against their own rules. British Boxing Board of Control General Secretary Robert Smith told me he would be "seeking clarification" from the American officials. But Mike Mazzulli, president of the U.S. Association of Boxing Commissions, told me that he "commended the action" of the Massachusetts commission: "He tested positive. I would have done exactly the same. It comes down to liability on the commission if anything happened."

A day after the fight was taken away from Saunders – reportedly worth $2.3 million to him – he relinquished the title. At the time, Warren told your correspondent that Saunders was so frustrated over the matter that he had said privately that he may never even box again. What irony after last December in Montreal, where Saunders gave one of the most virtuoso performances ever seen by a British boxer abroad when he completely outboxed the dangerous

knockout artist David Lemieux.

But what has compounded Saunders' situation was a tasteless video – "banter went wrong," according to his team – which involved taunting a female drug addict from inside his Rolls Royce, offering her crack cocaine and convincing her to hit an anonymous passerby for money, which led to the sternest warnings and a fine of £100,000 ($130,000) from the British Boxing Board after it found Saunders "guilty of bringing the sport into disrepute." Saunders apologized for his actions.

Behind all this mayhem, the now-former titleholder is a supremely talented southpaw boxer, so comfortable in a ring that he makes this hardest of sports look so easy. Saunders, who comes from a Romani family and lived on a Travellers' site near Hatfield all his life, would say that all he knows is boxing. His lineage includes a great-grandfather on his mother's side, Absolom Beeney, who was a legendary bareknuckle champion in the traveling fairground boxing booths. His world is the boxing that defines him, and it is hoped that he can get back into that sphere as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the success of Smith, stopping Groves to win the World Boxing Super Series, was overwhelming. The spiral Muhammad Ali Trophy, the WBA crown and The Ring magazine belt all belonged to the Liverpudlian after he ended Londoner Groves' reign – his third defense of the WBA title – in the seventh round. Smith caught Groves with a powerful counter left hook and, as the defending champion staggered backward, poured on the pressure with a flurry of punches. The Londoner fell and was unable to beat the count of referee Luis Pabon.

It was a fine performance – and finish – but what spoke loudest was the fighter sinking to his knees, only to be enveloped by the familial blanket of his father and three elder boxing brothers. The youngest warrior had completed his rite of passage. Father Paul has been there for every one of his sons' collective 128 professional fights: for Paul, Stephen, Liam and now Callum.

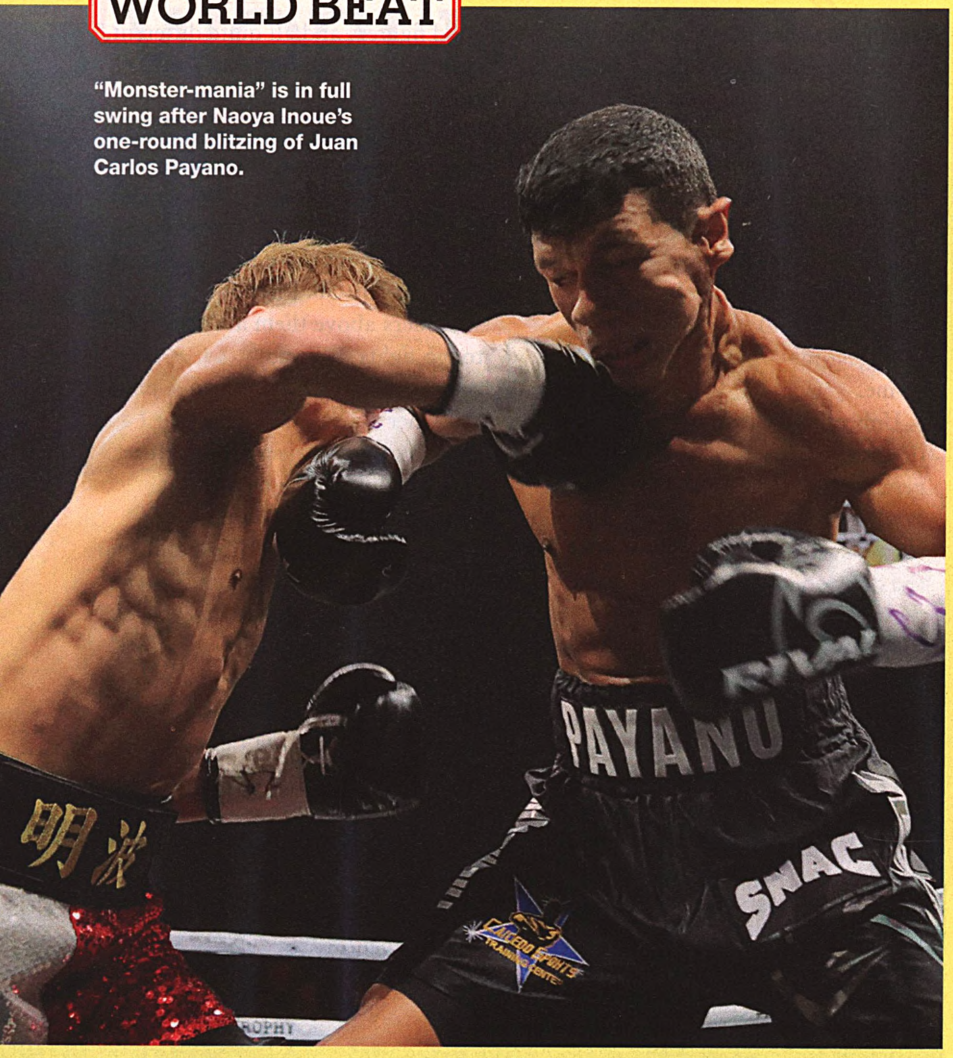
"I think you saw from their reaction how much it meant to them," Callum told me. "Every win is important to us, and we celebrate together. I think with me being youngest they're quite protective of me.

Unbeaten, freakishly big for the division at 6-foot-3, Smith has genuine power and ever-developing boxing ability, all of which put him in an excellent position to dominate the division, unless he wishes to move up to light heavyweight.

Smith certainly matches favorably against the other three titleholders: Jose Uzcategui (IBF), David Benavidez (WBC) and Gilberto Ramirez (WBO). "I think they're good fighters and all quite different," said Callum. "All four champions are in their 20s. Groves and James DeGale are in their 30s. It's a younger division now. Ramirez is a southpaw, very skillful and can fight the body. There's some very good fights out there that would be classed as 50-50. I'm not head and shoulders above them all; they are tough fights. Hopefully, a few years down the line, I'll have won some of the other belts and cement that I am the best in the division. But getting The Ring magazine belt meant so much, too." Pretty hallowed company, with Andre Ward and Joe Calzaghe. Top, top fighters. That's the legacy Smith should now be aiming at.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent of the London Telegraph.

Callum Smith (pictured with trainer Joe Gallagher) realized his potential by winning the Ring and WBA super middleweight titles.



"Monster-mania" is in full swing after Naoya Inoue's one-round blitzing of Juan Carlos Payano.

JAPAN

BY NICK SKOK

Naoya Inoue did more than just move into the World Boxing Super Series semifinal with his "Monster" knockout against Juan Carlos Payano; the 25-year-old bantamweight imprinted his name in the Japanese record books. That powerful right hand officially set a new mark for most consecutive knockouts by a Japanese fighter in world title bouts at seven, and also for the most knockouts in world title fights overall at 11. Previous record holders were Takashi Uchiyama and Yoko Gushiken, who each had 10 overall, while Gushiken also had his 39-year-old streak of six consecutive knockouts snapped.

After only 70 seconds, Inoue flattened Payano for what would be the quickest knockout in Japanese history, previously held at 92 seconds by Akinobu Hiranaka. Akihiko Honda, president of Teiken Gym and an expert in Japanese boxing, told The Ring he believes that Inoue could be the best Japanese fighter in history.

★★★

New Year's Eve is just around the corner, and that means title fights in Japan are once again going to close out the year. As one of the most celebrated holidays in the country, it's an opportune time for networks to showcase boxing to the masses as citizens are by and large on extended break from work and at home for large family meals.

Tokyo-based Watanabe Gym has secured the date every year since 2011 and has showcased former WBA junior lightweight titleholder Takashi Uchiyama and, as of last year, former Ring/IBF/WBA junior flyweight champion Ryoichi Taguchi in those main events. Taguchi recently told The Ring that he's focused on securing a rematch with Hekkie Budler, to whom Taguchi lost his belts in May. That would be the most lucrative option for Budler, who recently vacated his IBF title due to a low purse bid.

Another Watanabe Gym standout is looking to get his due with a title shot of his own, also in the junior flyweight division. Undefeated former IBF strawweight titleholder Hiroto Kyoguchi is eyeing WBO beltholder Angel Acosta while Hitoshi Watanabe, the gym's president and current head of the Japanese Professional Boxing Association, is sizing up Jonathan Taconing, whom Kyoguchi was ordered by the WBC to fight in a final eliminator. The organization's belt is held by Ken Shiro. "If I get a belt, I'd like to fight (in a unification) with Ken Shiro next," said Kyoguchi. "I think he's the best at junior flyweight."

Shiro, The Ring's No. 1-rated junior flyweight, successfully defended his title for the fourth time on the Inoue undercard, stopping Milan Melindo in seven rounds after the Filipino suffered a nasty cut. Shiro would like to stay in the division for the foreseeable future.

Masayuki Ito is the WBO junior lightweight titleholder and fought once on a Watanabe New Year's Eve Card in support of Uchiyama. Depending on how the matchmaking goes, a very trusted source with direct knowledge of the negotiations told The Ring that Ito may also be on this year's card or could perhaps headline the night before. His likely opponent is undefeated Evgeny Chuprakov, the WBO's No. 1-ranked 130-pounder.

Kazuto Ioka made his ring return this past September on HBO's third installment of the "Superfly" series. Ioka has fought on six New Year's Eve cards and may want to

do the same now that his 17-month retirement is over. The caveat with Ioka is that he's not able to fight inside Japan unless he registers first with the JBC, which requires him to belong to a specific gym. Having not belonged to a gym other than his father's, which he has since left due to tax evasion issues surrounding the gym, it was rumored we could see Ioka either in Shanghai or the Philippines.

Considering the popularity of the occasion, newly minted WBO flyweight titleholder Kosei Tanaka has also thrown his hat into the ring. Tanaka told The Ring that he'd prefer to face Taguchi next, as Taguchi wants to move up to flyweight should the Budler rematch not materialize. The two were supposed to have a unification fight last New Year's Eve before a Tanaka injury led to Taguchi facing and defeating Melindo instead.

It's no secret that domestic viewership for Tanaka's Fight of the Year candidate against Sho Kimura was surprisingly limited – shown only around Nagoya (where the fight was held) on a regional channel called CBC. Mr. Watanabe has a deal with TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System), so Tanaka and other fighters are eager to make fights with the gym when they can.

For reference, Japanese boxing megastar Ryota Murata now exclusively fights on DAZN Japan at home, while Naoya Inoue has a deal with Fuji TV.

Contact Nick Skok on Twitter @NoSparring.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

Jerwin Ancajas and his team knew they were in a bad spot after a dull mandatory defense against Jonas Sultan last May. What they had no idea about was that it was about to get even worse.

Alejandro Santiago, a plucky fringe contender from Tijuana, looked like the ideal opponent to make Ancajas must-see TV again. The Mexican was good, but not too good, and without a lot of pop in his hands. The plan was to tear through a sacrificial lamb and get promoter Bob Arum excited to build plans around the young southpaw from Davao.

Yet Santiago, 22 and fighting in his first world title fight, brought a level of maturity that Ancajas' braintrust hadn't counted on. Santiago exploited Ancajas' predictability throughout the televised bout, landing counter right hands whenever Ancajas (30-1-2, 20 KOs) tried to force the action. Ancajas was often a split-second behind Santiago, unable to be effective coming forward, and he couldn't get his timing on the back foot, either.

"I was surprised by his change of style," said Ancajas, having barely escaped with his IBF junior bantamweight title after a split draw was announced.

Punch stats told the story of Ancajas narrowly outlanding Santiago in total connects, but the biggest message came from the looks on ringside observers' faces, their averted eyes telling everything that needed to be said.

Yet instead of retreating into mandatories, Ancajas is big-game hunting again. With his black eyes barely healed, he flew to Thailand the following week to be at ringside for Srisaket Sor Rungvisai's defense of The Ring and WBC junior bantamweight titles against Iran Diaz. There, the two champions bowed at ringside and posed for photos with their belts. As luck would have it, Sor Rungvisai was granted an optional defense by the WBC before he has to face Juan Francisco Estrada once again. Ancajas' team wants that fight – a risky proposal that could bring them all the way back in a big way.

"I don't live in the past. I was always focused on the big fights," said Ancajas' matchmaker, Sean Gibbons. "This guy's a bull. Jerwin's gonna be the matador, and this guy is coming right at him. That'll bring out

Jerwin Ancajas barely escaped with his title after running into a tougher-than-expected Alejandro Santiago.

Michael Dasmarinas (right) remains on the fringe of contendership after a draw against Manyo Plange, who kept his undefeated record intact.

the best in Jerwin."

Ancajas had sought to distance himself from the comparisons to his co-promoter, Manny Pacquiao, and in his struggles showed just how forced those comparisons were. But now Ancajas must show that he IS like Pacquiao and take stock of the shortcomings in his game and improve on them. There was a time when Pacquiao was thought to be a one-handed fighter, particularly after his loss to Erik Morales in their first fight. When he returned for the rematch, Pacquiao rearranged Morales' face with a right hook he had worked diligently to perfect in the gym.

If Ancajas wants to emerge from the Pacquiao shadow and write his own legacy, he's going to have to show he can be great even when styles don't line up the way he'd like.

★★★

It seems that not a fight goes by in which Milan Melindo isn't spraying blood into the front row. It's something he's learned to live with, having been seriously cut in his last two fights and several others before that. Which is why, right before the referee waved off his challenge of Ken Shiro in the seventh round on October 7, he felt he had his opponent right where he wanted him.

"It distracted my vision to see incoming punches, but never frustrated me; it's a chance also to let my opponent come in, because they think I'm done," said Melindo, the former IBF junior flyweight titleholder, after his first stoppage loss. "I think the doctor is a newbie or something. This is boxing; running blood on faces is normal, because boxing is a brutal sport."

Melindo (37-4, 13 KOs), 30, has fought over 300 rounds as a pro, many of them punishing against high-quality opponents, and estimates he had 600 amateur bouts beginning as a young child. Before the question could even be asked, Melindo brushed aside the possibility of retirement.

"I will keep training and improve and develop what I need for the next episode," he said. "Time will come I'll become a world champion again, by will of God, with my hard work."

★★★

Ancajas isn't the only Filipino to settle for a stalemate: Michael Dasmarinas, the southpaw bantamweight who now fights out of Singapore, was held to a split draw on September 29 against Ghana's Manyo Plange. Plange, unbeaten yet untested at 17-0-1 (15 KOs) when he arrived in The Lion City, overcame Dasmarinas' superior strength and technique with willpower, outworking him in the middle rounds to make it close. The 10-round split draw did little to make other 118-pounders fear Dasmarinas (28-2-1, 19 KOs), and perhaps the result can help him lure some of the boxers who are ousted from the World Boxing Super Series to make the trip over to the Marina Bay Sands.

★★★

Good news: Dave Penalosa (14-0, 10 KOs) is back. Bad news: His fight against a well-overmatched Tanzanian named Twalib Tuwa on September 30 lasted just two rounds, as did his previous fight – the first since a layoff of nearly two years – making it hard to tell just how back he is. The legacy boxer, whose father is former two-division titleholder Dodie Boy Penalosa Sr., and whose uncle Gerry Penalosa replicated that feat, acknowledged he was behind schedule in his career due to long gaps of inactivity and wanted real fights.

Dodie Boy Sr. said he had hoped his son, now 27, had gotten in more rounds, but expects him to have a tougher test in his next fight.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The South African boxing community held its collective breath as one of their favorite sons, No.

2-ranked bantamweight Zolani "Last Born" Tete, defended his WBO title against Armenia-born Russian and former amateur star Mikhail Aloyan in Ekaterinburg, Russia, on October 13. The fight took place in the quarterfinals of the World Boxing Super Series 118-pound tournament, and that in itself represents a first for South Africans.

Aloyan, a two-time world amateur champion and Olympic medalist, was considered the dark horse of the WBSS on account of having only four pro fights under his belt. Would he be the proverbial banana peel for Tete to slip on, or a fortuitous draw for the South African?

It turned out he was neither, as Tete won a unanimous decision in an often untidy, tactical fight by two scores of 114-111 and third card of 114-110.

Tete started off confidently in the opening round, boxing aggressively behind the jab. A right hook scrambled Aloyan's balance to the extent that his glove touched the canvas for a flash knockdown. The tough-as-nails challenger wasn't in any trouble, though.

Tete continued using his height and reach to jab and score with an occasional well-placed body shot, but Aloyan got more aggressive in the fourth round and began jumping in with short jabs and lead hooks from the southpaw stance. Tete used his superior ring generalship to take back control of the fight in the fifth stanza, and then things got scrappy from the sixth onward, with Aloyan sticking his head underneath Tete's armpit and jerking him around when the distance closed.

Aloyan jumped forward every now and then and tried to land something, with varying success, and then clinched and wrestled, not wanting to risk protracted exchanges on the inside. Tete continued using his jab to good effect in between those rushes, making for some hard-to-score rounds.

Tete landed some good hooks to the body in the 10th round, but when he used an elbow to push Aloyan away in one of the many mauls, the referee docked him a point. Aloyan also sustained a cut over his right eye for his trouble.

In the penultimate round, the referee deducted a point from Aloyan for excessive holding, neutralizing the deductions. Aloyan pushed hard in the 12th round, but it was too little, too late, as Tete (28-3, 21 KOs) was declared the deserving winner of the ugly fight. The WBSS has to be commended for being free of scoring controversy – touch wood.

Tete will now face the winner of Ryan Burnett vs. Nonito Donaire in the semifinals to unify the WBO and WBA belts. Either opponent figures to be a more fan-friendly matchup.

★★★

At the WBC convention in early October, a final eliminator was mandated between No. 5-ranked strawweight Simphiwe Khonco and Japan's No. 7-ranked Tsubasa Koura, the winner becoming the mandatory challenger for long-reigning titleholder Wanheng Menayothin. As of this writing, no date had been set.

A rematch between Ring and WBA junior flyweight champion Hekkie Budler and Ryoichi Taguchi is also in the works for New Year's Eve in Japan, although this fight is yet to be finalized.

Former light heavyweight contender Thomas Oosthuizen, now campaigning as a cruiserweight, won a razor-thin decision against local rival Thabiso Mchunu on September 1 at Emperors Palace in Kempton Park. A rematch has now been set for December 8 in the same venue.

On the same night, streaking welterweight Thulani "Evolution" Mbenge (14-0, 11 KOs), fresh off a stoppage victory over Diego Chaves, will face another test in former IBF lightweight titleholder Miguel Vasquez. The tricky "Titere" should be able to give us an idea of how close Mbenge is to breaking into the top 10 of the star-studded welterweight division.

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BIG MISTAKE

On Nov. 14, 1998, pound-for-pound king Roy Jones Jr. defended his WBA and WBC light heavyweight titles against Canada's Otis Grant. The challenger, a former WBO middleweight beltholder, had made the audacious choice of moving up two full divisions to face what many felt was an unbeatable opponent. The bout was contested at a catchweight of 172 pounds, but that did little to aid the naturally smaller man. Jones had everything his own way, dropping the outgunned southpaw twice en route to an emphatic 10th-round stoppage. RING

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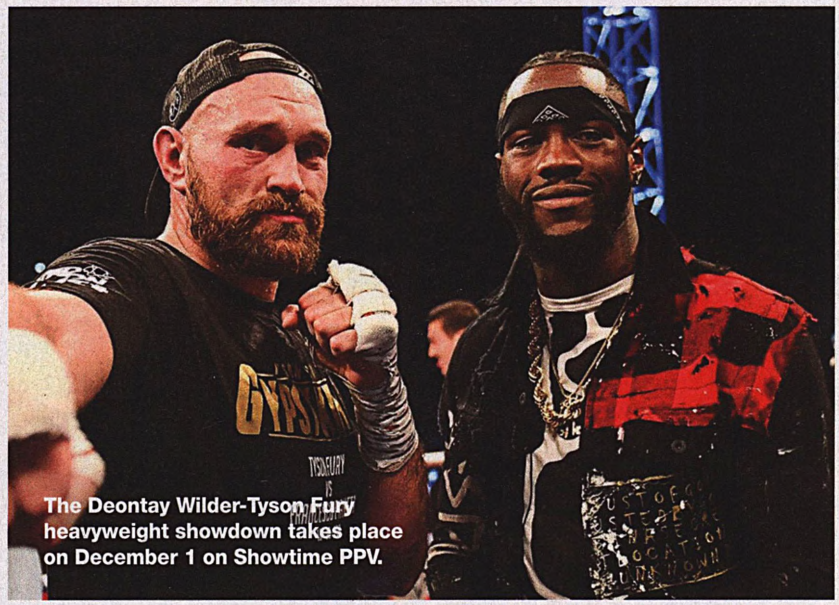

The Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury heavyweight showdown takes place on December 1 on Showtime PPV.

Canelo Alvarez makes his DAZN debut against British super middleweight Rocky Fielding on December 15.

DECEMBER

DEC. 1 – Deontay Wilder vs. Tyson Fury, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Los Angeles (Showtime PPV).

DEC. 1 – Adonis Stevenson vs. Oleksandr Gvozdyk, light heavyweights (for Stevenson's WBC title), Quebec City, Canada.

DEC. 8 – Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Jose Pedraza, lightweights (for Lomachenko's Ring/WBA and Pedraza's WBO titles), New York (ESPN). Also, Isaac Dogboe vs. Emanuel Navarrete, junior featherweights (for Dogboe's WBO title).

DEC. 14 – Gilberto Ramirez vs. Jesse Hart, super middleweights (for Ramirez's WBO title), Corpus Christi, Texas (ESPN+).

DEC. 15 – Rocky Fielding vs. Canelo Alvarez, super middleweights, New York (DAZN).

DEC. 22 – Josh Warrington vs. Carl Frampton, featherweights (for Warrington's IBF title), Manchester, England.

DEC. 22 - Jermall Charlo vs. Willie Monroe Jr., middleweights, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Fox). Also, Jermell Charlo vs. Tony Harrison, junior middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title).

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